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Our faith in God through
Jesus Christ

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OUR FAITH IN GOD

OUR FAITH IN GOD

THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

FOUR APOLOGETIC ADDRESSES

BY

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Foreword

THE four addresses which follow were delivered at a conference held in Belfast during January 1922 by the Student Christian Movement and the Irish Christian Fellowship. In the form of answers to four common questions they attempt to outline and defend the Christian view of God, and to set forth the more obvious of its implications for life. Written as they were for a conference concerned very largely with Irish problems and affairs, they are, at points, decidedly topical in treatment; but all such references will, I think, be found by the readers to be easily susceptible of translation into forms suitable to quite other environments. The aim of the writer throughout has been practical rather than theoretical, and these addresses are offered to the public, not as a considered statement of systematic apologetics, but as the attempt of an individual to deal positively, and untheologically, so far as possible, with some of the more persistent doubts in the general mental atmosphere of our day.

BELFAST, *January* 1922

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TO
MY PARENTS

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The First Question: Is it Reasonable?

INTELLECTUALLY, the modern world is very much alive; everything men believe is being placed under the microscope, and not least religious beliefs, the very importance of which, as concerned with the fundamental problems of the universe and the ultimate issues of life, has led to an exceptional interest in the questions of religion, and above all of the Christian faith. Not a few to-day within the Church, or on its borders, are greatly concerned about the shaking which the Christian systems of the past have recently undergone, by reason of the literary and philosophical criticisms that modern and scientific inquiry and discovery have brought to birth, and by reason of the social and practical challenges thrown out by modern industrial and political movements and by the cataclysm of the greatest of the world's wars; and we are all more or less in a position of intellectual uncertainty about many things which our forefathers took for granted, or believed without any great trouble.

I have, therefore, chosen for my subject to-day the question—Is the Christian conception of God reasonable for the thought of man? I would say here, before I proceed to answer it, that throughout these addresses

I am speaking for myself, not for the Church Catholic, in what I shall say, though at the same time I venture to hope that my views will, on the whole, represent the Christianity of educated and serious men to-day; at any rate a sincere view in which I shall, as far as possible, avoid controverted points, is the best thing I can give to this audience, or to anyone.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "REASONABLE"?

Coming then to my subject—Is the Christian conception of God reasonable?—we must, before we can attempt seriously to answer this question, ask and answer two prior questions:

(1) What is the Christian conception of God? and

(2) What is to be understood by the word "reasonable"?

Let us take the latter first. Now I do not, of course, believe that any faith of a religious or moral kind can be demonstrated according to the methods of mathematics; for all attempts to locate and define for the purpose of accurate thought and logical proof break down when we touch upon the unseen and infinite world with which we are inevitably concerned in our religious and moral ideas. Faith is a concrete thing in most of its bearings; the exact sciences are the most abstract things

we know. Only in the sheer abstraction of sciences such as Geometry or Algebra is anything like absolute consistency and irrefragable demonstration attainable, and that at the cost of creating such irrational symbols as, for example, the square root of minus one; in the concrete matters of practical life, to which faith in its true sense belongs, the most we can attain to along this line of reasoning is probability. Therefore, I do not propose to essay the folly of attempting to show that the Christian idea of God can be fully comprehended and established in terms of our petty human logic, and of our vague and circumscribed human knowledge. What I shall seek to show is that the Christian belief in God is more satisfactory to the human mind than a denial of it, more satisfactory, that is, to the judgment of the whole personality with its varied faculties of thought—logical, instinctive, intuitive, æsthetic, and practical.

Faith in the sphere of religion is, to my mind (as Dr Hadfield has suggested), the counterpart of hypothesis in the sphere of science; it is an interpretation of the world, seen and unseen, upon which we base our lives and our practice, and by which progress in character or in society becomes possible. Faith is not sight; it is not certainty, but venture—venture upon the unseen in response to the deepest voices of the soul; it is staking one's all upon a certain construction of life which has commended itself

to us as the most satisfactory open to our judgments. Christian faith is simply the best interpretation of this life and this universe that we have at our disposal—the interpretation which has come to us in and through Christ; and in spite of all the difficulties which surround the questions of such a faith, we know it to be largely a self-evidencing thing. As men we are called upon, not only to think, but to act; we must choose our actions, and therefore as intelligent men we must choose further the principles of our actions, and of our lives generally. These principles embody our faith, no matter what label we may put upon ourselves in matters of religion; and I hold that in Christianity we have the most satisfactory way of life, as tested and examined by any or all of man's faculties, the most satisfactory of all the systems of principles of action held by or known to the race of man. Once our choice of Christianity as a faith has been made, indeed, we are in a fair way to prove it reasonable in a far truer and more convincing way, by verification of its practical truth, by finding that it works; and thus our faith, beginning in a judgment and a choice of a somewhat uncertain kind, grows stronger and clearer as our beliefs are established and our ventures justified by their works. But that greater question of practical verification belongs to my third address; here I am concerned with the abstract question of the reasonableness of

our Christian thought of God, and I shall aim at showing that Christianity in this respect is not only not unreasonable, but inherently more reasonable, than any substitute for it. Beyond that point I do not think man's thought can go in the abstract. Faith is never exchanged for knowledge, except subjectively, and, despite all the labours of theologians to put Christianity on a logical or theoretically convincing basis, I do not believe God ever permits man's thought to remove life from the plane of trust, venture, and self-surrender to that of a comfortable certainty. It is not in comfort, but in effort, whether of mind or body, that character is wrought and salvation attained, either for ourselves or others ; our only assurance is that which we may win for ourselves by a faith which without works is dead, a living practical attitude of trust, venture, and self-abnegation.

Passing now from this pragmatic conception of faith as the true heroism, and from the modified reasonableness which alone can be predicated of any faith, I come to the second and more important of the two questions I raised earlier—What is the Christian conception of God ?

THE FACT OF GOD

Here there is a great variety in the answers which clamour for our attention, but I shall

try to give an answer which will have a more or less uncontroversial form. It is sometimes said that a simple statement of the faith is the best argument for it; and certainly such a statement will largely answer the question of its reasonableness, with which I am primarily concerned to-day. Hence I shall discuss side by side the two chief questions of the content and the reasonableness of the Christian faith in God.

Christianity is the following, or better, the attempted following, of the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth; and this following must be thought of in two ways—as a following in thought and as a following in conduct. If we seek to have the mind of Christ, and if we seek to do the works of Christ, we are Christians. That which entitles us to be called by the historical name of Christ is that we aim at reproducing in our own lives the thoughts or mind of Christ—His values, His principles, His conceptions, His mental attitude to God and man—and the works or active life of Christ—His selflessness, His trust, His wisdom, His courage, His love, His moral passion. The Christian conception of God belongs to the first class; to have it, is to have the mind of Christ with regard to God, and to that point I now turn in detail, that I may point out what Christ's thought of God actually is, as recorded for us in the New Testament.

In the first place, Christ shows no doubt about

the fact of God. All His thought, in all its ramifications, centres round one who is called "God." In Christ's own day, and in our day, we find some who profess no belief in God, or who even profess disbelief in Him. Is this primary idea of God reasonable ?—that is our first question. There are some to-day, seemingly honourable and intelligent men, who call themselves Atheists, Agnostics, and the like. What of them ? Well! their number is not in itself great in any age, and these men represent largely the difficulties of intellectual specialists, arising from abstraction and the loss of mental proportion, together with a following for their negative views from among social and intellectual rebels. On the whole, their existence is fairly enough explained by the almost inevitable reaction against the almost inevitable mis-statements of believers. The exorbitant claims of authority and of ecclesiasticism generally beget such honest doubters in every age, and a less honest doubt also swells their ranks ; but neither in numbers, nor in moral and intellectual quality, is this section of mankind of very great moment. Believers in God have always had the great mass of mankind with them, and usually the ablest and noblest men too. The problem in itself goes back to immemorial antiquity, and is no new discovery of the modern man ; and the negatives of a few have never commended themselves to the great body, either

of the uneducated or of the educated. It is important, however, to realise at this point the difference between denying the name and denying the reality. Few of the ablest and most comprehensive and constructive thinkers in any community have been deniers of a God ; but taking those who do exist, we must distinguish between their theoretical rejection of the idea of God as expressed or defined by past or present theologians, whether scholarly or popular, and their practical acceptance of those things which God actually is—that is, those conceptions which the word " God " stands for.

Many men will accept the obligations of truth or unselfishness, for example, without realising that truth is God, and love is God, and that to call these things principles is only another way of consigning them to the unseen world, and of declaring that that unseen world is the standard of the seen. The man who will follow truth wherever it may lead him is worshipping God in the most real sense ; the man who will face discomfort and danger for the sake of a stranger is offering to God the most genuine homage, and both alike are declaring their faith implicitly, if not explicitly, in the one ultimate reality which actually includes goodness, truth, beauty, power, love, and all the other things which we truly value. If we accept these things as our ultimate guides in life, we must be theists,

or polytheists; and theism is surely the more rational and reasonable! But to follow any of these ultimate values is a partial worship of and confession of God, and the truest worshipper of God is a follower of them all.

Again, the belief in God is more reasonable than a disbelief, for this reason in particular, that it stands for the unity of all those things which we value as ultimate; *i.e.* it denies polytheism even in its most specious form. It is more reasonable that our values should be related, that they should have a common source, than that they should be unrelated and derived from varying sources; *i.e.* it is more reasonable to have one God than many. In our actual lives these values have a relation and a unity which it is surely reasonable that they should have also at their source. The ideals, principles, values of man belong to an unseen but most real world, and the idea of God simply stands for the unity of man's aspirations and the unity of their satisfaction. The idea of God makes of this unseen world an intelligible system, a coherent cosmos; the denial of God (I use the word, of course, in its barest sense) makes of it a chaos, and leaves us in the darkness. It is reasonable to find unity in our ideals, as we find it in nature about us, and for this unity we use and need the word "God."

But above all—and I do not use the phrase in a merely pantheistic sense—God is the All,

the great social fact which binds together all life, as well as all thought, into a unity. We all admire unselfishness, and the philosophy and practice of the altruist. But what is altruism? It is a setting of the *alter*, the other, "the not-self," above the self in this life. "God" is, after all, a better and a simpler word than "the not-self," in referring to this unity to which man surrenders the self; and in one point at least the idea of God is manifestly an improvement upon the category of the "not-self" as a fundamental and moral conception, inasmuch as God, the All, includes the self as well as "the not-self." We all believe that even the self has claims upon us; it is that part of the All with which we have most to do, and it has a positive social value as well as its negative egoistic tendencies. We believe in a self-development which does not injure others and which is not "selfish"; that is, the self has a real place, not as the centre of our universe, but as a unit in it, with which in actual fact we have more to do than with any other similar unit. It is our egoism which is wrong, our self-centred living, and when for self we put as our ideal, not the "not-self" of philosophy, but the All who is God, we find our difficulties solved, for in doing our duty to the All we shall do the best even by ourselves, since the All includes all the parts. The idea of God is, then, the simplest means of expressing our moral ideals, whether we

call ourselves theists or atheists ; and in the last analysis among sane and right-living men and women there are no atheists. To be God-centred instead of self-centred is the greatest of human achievements, and it is the life of Christ.

Thus we see that God stands for all that we value in life—æsthetic, intellectual, moral, spiritual, physical, social, and so forth ; and no other word can so fitly and adequately express the unity of human values as this, which connotes the source and substance of all that makes life worthy. It is theological conceptions of God that Atheism and Agnosticism are out against, not the ultimate values of truth, beauty, goodness, social unity, and the like, for which the word stands ; and when I use the word " God " I am referring to this prime fact of the universe, to the source and substance of all our principles and ideals, our faculties and powers, our personalities and social relations, and to their organic unity. And if anyone quarrel with the assumption of unity, I need only point out that the scientist is quite as emphatic about the unity of nature as the Christian about the unity of God, and the two mean much the same thing, with this advantage to the latter view that it regards the unity as being both intelligent and moral, as well as physical, such being the unity which we know in our own experiences. But it is far more important to worship that

which God is, and to surrender self to a comprehensive altruism of a practical kind, than to pay lip homage to a word. The sceptic is sometimes a truer worshipper of the living God than those who are glib in their use of His name.

Now the consciousness of Jesus Christ, so far as we can interpret it, is primarily occupied with this fundamental reality of human life, the God to whom belongs all power, all wisdom, all life, and all that life has or does—in short, Christ's relation to God is an immediate relation to the unseen and its powers, in which self is lost, and the unseen God is the centre and substance of life. Such a life is the affirmation of God, it is God's life; and the divinity of Christ is the Church's interpretation of the life of the supreme Mystic who has taught us that "he that will lose his 'self,' the same shall keep it." Salvation, thus, is the loss of egoism, the merging of all self-interest in this God who is All.

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

But this God is not for Christ a power, a thing, but a person. It is here that many to-day find their greatest difficulty; they can admit God as an impersonal something, a force, or an energy, or even a treasury of moral principles, but to them personality appears, not as a unifying, but as a dividing

conception—as that which separates man from man. I think they are the victims of a wrong method of analysis or abstraction, and if, instead of removing from their conception of God, as they do, the things they find in man (as though they could most satisfactorily get back to God by the method of *exclusion*), they were to keep these things, and all that instinctively, intuitively, æsthetically, intellectually and practically they regard as of value in human life, and carry these things back to God as their source and cause (*i.e.* the method of *inclusion*), they would be nearer to a reasonable conception of God. Surely God is not less than man ! And the things to which we attach ultimate value are the most likely to belong to ultimate being. For where else did these things come from—our unselfish impulses, our æsthetic joys, our hunger after better things, spiritual, mental, or physical, our powers of body and mind ? Surely water has not risen above its own level ! Surely these things come from somewhere in the universe, some fount of life and life's goods, some directing intelligence pouring itself into life as we know it ! It is more reasonable to believe that these things have come from God, and belong to God, than that they come from nowhere, have made themselves, or that the higher goods of life are to be explained by the lower. Such a view is an inversion both of our values and of our sense of congruity.

But the things we most value belong to personality, therefore the idea of God is not a denial of personality, or of those things we value in personality, but stands for perfect personality (of which ours is but a shadow), and for the source of all these things we value, and even of our power to value them. Our own intelligence demands intelligence in the world, both as the explanation of itself and of the ordered cosmos as we see it; our sense of beauty drives us back on an ultimate source both of beauty and the power to appreciate it; above all, our moral and spiritual quests with their unfulfilled aspirations carry us far beyond ourselves, for they do not register what we are, but prophesy what we may become. These elements in life lift our minds to something infinitely higher than ourselves, yet akin to us—the source of our aspirations, and of the enthusiasm to embrace and pursue them, and of the power to accomplish them. When we speak of God as a person, then, we mean that He possesses all that we possess of real value and more—intelligence, feelings, will, personality, and so forth, and that He is the source and explanation of our possession of these things; in other words, that we are made in His image.

THE LOVE OF GOD

But, to go a step further, this personal God is by Jesus Christ regarded as good. Goodness is our chief value in life, and once we admit the personality of God we must admit His goodness. No human mind has ever taken seriously the thought of God as evil. If He be a machine He might be regarded as neutral—and the conception of God as morally neutral is bound up in a belief in his impersonality—but if He be personal, He must be good. Just as surely as we value the goodness of man, so surely we value the goodness of God, and find in the latter the source and rationale of the former. But goodness is a word admitting of many degrees, and for the perfect goodness of His perfect personality the best word is that which implies for us the highest form of goodness we know, *i.e.* LOVE—the selfless conception of life which involves sacrifice, benevolence, trustworthiness, service, and altruism generally; and this is the way in which Christ speaks of God; He refers to him habitually as Father. The very noblest and tenderest elements in life are used to interpret the unseen God; nor is this unreasonable, for these things must have their source somewhere in that great unseen and still uncomprehended storehouse, which some speak of as Nature, but which is God. All fatherhood, all love, all affection and unselfish concern,

are but a shadow of something greater, the unseen Love which called us into being, and in unselfishness maintains and directs our ways. Jesus has taught us to say "Abba, Father" into the seeming darkness and silence round about us. The message of the Fatherhood of God is perhaps the greatest gift He brought to man, though it is not the only one, and to this love of the All-Father Christianity, following the spirit of Christ's teaching, rather than the letter of apostolic or other records, has learned to put no limits. It is for Christ no mean haggling relation of mutual interests, but a limitless ocean of divine passion, concern, and care.

> "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you ; that you may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven : for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." [1]

The words of Christ are full of such teaching ; the long-suffering patient love of God pours out its gifts even upon the ungrateful and the evil, and those who are His children must reflect this changelessness and impartiality of true selfless love. Nor is there any stint in His love in respect of wasted or misused

[1] Matt. v. 43-45.

talents and opportunities. God's disciplines may be called for by His love, and exercised in love, but once a man has come into the vineyard of God, be the hour early or late, he receives equally with all the other labourers his penny a day; he is not "docked" in respect of his past; repentance and obedience have cancelled the past, and he is heir to the whole resources of the Father. He who cares for the sparrows cares for man. He who numbers the hairs of our head is acquainted with our every need and desire. Such a God cares for each one of us more than our parents, more than lover, or children, more than we even care for ourselves. The measure of our self-love, great as it is, is small beside the unmeasured love which has created and watches over us. God will never take an unfair advantage of us. He will never wound except in love and mercy. He will never despise us, nor mock at us; and to such a love only can man give an unreserved trust. It is the selflessness of God which takes from Christianity all fear and all sting; the realisation of the love of God with all its implications is life's truest salvation; and on man's side it is gained and maintained only by trust. This trust or faith is the counterpart of Christ's conception of God; man's duty is not only to accept intellectually the true conception of God, but to cast the weight of his life, both spiritually and physically, upon it. This

attitude of the soul, of acceptance, trust and venture, is salvation as preached by Christ.

> "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." [1]

It has taken the Church many centuries to learn to think of God even in a measure as Christ spoke of Him, but there is no lesson in the world more important for either individual or social life. "God is Love" we read in 1 John, and men are beginning to value to-day what has been true, though unapprehended, since Christ interpreted God to man, viz., that His love is the fundamental fact of all our lives, and all that exists, and that it is not less, but infinitely more than any love of ours, and is to be interpreted in terms of St Paul's great vision of love.

> "Love suffereth long and is kind, love envieth not, love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth." [2]

That is God.

In a love like that our minds can find rest, and to a love like that our wills can make the fullest surrender. God may be, and is, other

[1] Matt. vi. 31-33. [2] 1 Cor. xiii. 4-8.

things beside love, but the controlling conception of God is, and must be, that of Father.

THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF GOD

But this love is no mere isolated emotion, it is linked up with all the faculties of that perfect personality which we call God—His mind, His power, His will, His wise and gracious purposes. If I may put it so, God has a body as well as a soul. What are our bodies but the instruments for realising and expressing our soul's life ; and if the soul of God be love, it has its body or organs of self-expression which we refer to under such words as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, eternity, and infinity, words which may often be weak and unsatisfactory symbols of the truth, but which express for us the more quantitative (as opposed to the more qualitative) aspects of God's being, and the means to His self-expression. Christ tells us, in words already quoted—and I believe he meant it—that not a sparrow falleth to the ground without our Father ; He tells us again—and I think it is integral to Christ's conception of God—that the very hairs of our head are all numbered.

The word " omnipotence " is perhaps the most important and the most criticised in this connection. God is everywhere known in Christendom as the Almighty ; and, while

the word "omnipotence" has aroused a good deal of discussion in the sphere of Christian philosophy, with all due respect to some modern theologians whose criticisms of the word seems remarkably like an apology for the faithlessness and weakness of the modern Church, I venture to affirm that the essential idea of omnipotence is as central to the Christian faith to-day as it was to Christ's teaching as we have it recorded in our Gospels. Christ's whole gospel, mystically conceived and expressed as it is, rests implicitly upon the idea of God as THE ALL, possessed of all power, all knowledge, all goodness, and so forth, and as mediating these things to His children as they need them; and I believe that He is absolutely right. The word "omnipotence" is open to many a quibble; there is no proof except experience, and experience can only carry us to the belief that in God there is all the power that we need. After all, the more physical or quantitative elements in our conception of God must be explained by the directing intelligence behind, and if we believe that God possesses all the powers necessary to accomplish His will or purposes, that, I think, is all that we, as Christians, are required to believe. It is not an abstract conception of omnipotence that we need, but a belief that between God's purposes, small or great, and the means of carrying them out, there is no disproportion, but a provision in material things for all the spiritual needs of the divine plan. This is

a practical conception of God's omnipotence, which is not open to metaphysical objections or dilemmas (such as, Could God make a weight so heavy that He could not lift it Himself ?), and where it has been tested in Christian experience by men of faith it has been proved abundantly. The word "omnipotence" may cause some difficulties, but I hold that it is not only more reasonable to accept it than to reject it, but that the root conception is fundamental to Christ's thought of God, and to ours. "Soule is forme, and doth the bodie make," Spenser sang long ago, and I believe that the soul of God, His loving intelligence, has created its body of physical and other powers, competent to all the demands made upon it by the purposes of the eternal Father. The gospel of miracle, properly understood, is as essential to Christianity as it is actual in the life of Christ, and it rests upon the power, knowledge, and other resources of God as inexhaustible and all-sufficient. Perhaps, after all, the words "inexhaustible" or "all-sufficient," which are in no way coloured by theological use and abuse, are better in this connection than the old word "omnipotent." Christ certainly teaches that the power of God is equal to any emergency, that our resources in Him are always greater than we know, and that no unforeseen chance can befall us any more than the birds of the air. Man may fail to put himself in line with the purposes of

God, but he cannot interfere with those purposes themselves. This nerveless, doubting and feeble age is, in many quarters to-day, seeking to explain away its failures in faith by emphasising the difficulties of the conception of God which Jesus preached to men, but personally I believe that this very thing which they question is the faith that overcometh the world, the secret of Christ's own life and miracles so-called, and of the power of His personality upon His own and subsequent ages. But it is none the less the clearer vision of our age which is producing such doubt as its first, though not its final, offspring; this age is really nearer to the Kingdom than those which are gone, and the conscious darkness is the prelude of the dawn. Out of weakness we are made strong, and the doubts of honest men are often the foundations of faith, since such doubt is but a groping after truth, the challenge of tradition by a sincere mind with a vision of something better. In the doubt but reality of our age the way is being prepared for a greater faith, as men are coming to comprehend the true meaning of faith, and to realise that all proof and assurance are subjective things, won, not in reasoning, but in venturing.

BY WAY OF RÉSUMÉ

I hold then, as I have said, that it is reasonable to believe in a God, a source of all things,

and in particular of our values—æsthetic, mental and moral. I hold it reasonable to believe that this God is personal, otherwise the highest things in life—thought, purpose, affection, impulse, feeling, choice and consciousness—are left without an explanation; and if we are going to explain things at all, we ought to begin with those which we value most—our moral principles and aspirations, our sense of the value of personality, of the rights of freedom, and the like. I hold it reasonable to believe that this personal God is good in the highest sense, otherwise man is greater than God; for man has at least a measure of that goodness and unselfishness which he follows, and surely this high vision, unrealised, but potent, in man, comes from some source that cannot be found in man's lower past! Therefore, I hold it reasonable to believe that this God, the God of Jesus Christ, is Love, or Father; and when I find this conception freeing, ennobling and empowering life, and creating the worthiest character, I feel it is more than reasonable, it is true; and God being such, I hold that Christ's way of faith is perfectly reasonable. In such a God one can trust; and I know of no case in which that trust, once given, has been disappointed; faith has brought its own verification, its own assurance and peace, to those who have ventured upon God without fear, and with a whole heart. It is this experimental verification of

Christianity, as shown in the New Testament records, and in all the biographies of the saints, ancient or modern, which is the final proof of the reasonableness of Christianity, but it is a proof only given to venturing trust in that measure which carries conviction.

Absolute theoretical proof of Christianity would destroy the moral value, the spiritual heroism, of faith—it would turn it into mere prudence—and such proof is not given to men ; but a man who will think seriously is led sooner or later to see that the presumptions, even in theory, are in favour of Christianity rather than against it, and, from this evaluation of the imperative of Christianity as greater than all others, he is led to make that venture which shall prove Christianity to himself, and to the world. And such faith is no mere selfish thing. Every man who tests and proves the gospel of God's grace is a benefactor of mankind. In the advance of medicine, of exploration, of applied science, men have again and again taken their lives in their hands for the sake of knowledge and of mankind. So it is in religion ; men of faith and venture will not only achieve their own salvation in peace, and power, and knowledge, but will bring the world appreciably nearer to the same salvation, and to Him who is the Captain of it—Jesus Christ the great venturer. What does Gethsemane mean, what does Calvary mean, but venture ? What do the miracles of

Christ, what do the methods of Christ, as outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, and as practised in relation to the men and women about Him, mean, but venture?—venture on God in every sense, and upon that which is divine in the human heart. And this venture is the great world need to-day, and if the Church had more of it—*i.e.* more testing of its faith—apologetic lectures would be little needed; for what men are seeking is not a religion theoretically and satisfactorily consistent, but one which is practically helpful and self-evidencing in its results.

THE SOCIAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THIS FAITH

But Christ's thought of God had always a social side to it, or rather, it was fundamentally social in its practical meaning; for corresponding to the Father were the children, and Christ's gospel was the social gospel of the Kingdom. I have said before that to a mystic mind God always appears in a social aspect as the inclusive ALL, but Christ gives the actual message of His gospel an explicitly social form in the parables and laws of the Kingdom which He founds, so that over against the Fatherhood of God is set the brotherhood of men. Men are to find their unity in God as His people, or Kingdom, but their relations with one another are to be the relations of brothers and

sisters, in whom self has been denied and God affirmed as the ultimate fact in life; not ego, but God, is the centre of the disciples' life, and to have attained to that way of life is to have entered the Kingdom, to have found the treasure in the field, to have discovered the pearl of great price; for love, selflessness, and brotherhood are the Kingdom, the treasure, and the pearl. We have many social problems about us—more, we assure ourselves, than Christ had, though perhaps mistakenly, certainly not many more—but for them all the life of Christ still offers to us this one solution, the Kingdom, *i.e.* a new attitude or spirit, a new passion or power, which we may call brotherhood, or selflessness, or love, but which is God, the one great absorbing fact of Christ's consciousness, and the resolution of all His and our difficulties. God is the source of all life and power, and of all guidance and wisdom; and the ethic of Christ is an ethic of absolute trust, not in the seeming powers of man's might or knowledge, but in spiritual and unseen powers released by faith, self-surrender and obedience. This trust in spiritual realities and power, so evident in Christ's teaching, and so counter to our present worldly prejudices, is the secret of Christ's own life and works and influence.

But is it reasonable? George Fox was once told that his teaching was not common sense, and his reply was, "It is not common sense, it

is the Kingdom of God," *i.e.*—as I understand his words—it is *uncommon* sense. To me, personally, these things do seem reasonable, judged according to my own experience and my own reading of human records past and present ; but I know that the illusions of life die hard, and I do not believe that I could ever establish its reasonableness to the satisfaction of the unbelieving critic. Christ's way has not been tried except by individuals. They have been extraordinarily successful in the verification of their faith, so far as I know their stories, but for the world at large Christ's way is still a vision, a hypothesis, a faith ; and I believe that it is incumbent upon all His followers to put it to the test, not only for their own sake but for the sake of the world. I find it hard not to despise the man who professes to follow Christ, and shrinks from even trying to put into practice Christ's explicit teaching ; far rather would I have the man who thinks Christ mistaken, and dares to say so. Sooner or later an honest disciple of Christ must face the question, " Was Christ a fool, or had He a divine wisdom ? " Up to a point I believe the world will concede the reasonableness of Christianity ; but there is a point beyond which we must as Christians advance in our following of Him, where the world will proclaim us fools, as the men of His age proclaimed Christ, only some day, as I believe, to acclaim us as wise men, when their eyes have been opened,

and Christ has at last won the approval of the world which crucified Him, and which even yet understands Him so little.

The way of faith has been proved in science —hypothesis is the way of progress; it has been proved in commerce—the world rests upon credit; it has been proved in social intercourse—trust and responsibility succeed in drawing out of men what nothing else does, or can; it has been proved in disease—the suggestion of health can produce health; it has been proved again and again in religion, in the stories of the great souls of Christendom. Some of us have proved it in a measure for ourselves, and I have never met any man or woman who regretted a true venture of faith. Have we courage to try it, and to risk our little lives and our petty interests for the Kingdom of God? "He that will save his life shall lose it, but he that will lose it for My sake, and the Gospel's, the same shall keep it unto life eternal."

JESUS CHRIST THE REVELATION OF GOD

Christianity, however, is not a mere belief in God. It is a Christian belief in God, *i.e.* belief in God through Jesus Christ. The word "God" in itself means little apart from a definition of it, and the Christian view of God is that which we have found in and through Jesus Christ, in His teaching, and in His life

and doings. Christ for the Christian is the measure of God, so far as we have a measure. He is the visible image in the records of history of the invisible deity. In all life the unseen must be interpreted by the seen; we cannot think in terms of that which has no meaning for the concrete knowledge of our senses. To interpret God in terms of humanity is certainly better than to interpret Him by abstractions such as "Spirit," or by any lower category of life; but to interpret Him in terms of Jesus Christ, the highest life that this world knows, is to form the highest possible idea of Him; and the divinity of Christ, whatever its theological content and difficulties, means primarily this—that God is like Jesus. In other words, when the Christian thinks of God, inevitably he thinks of Jesus, through whom he knows God. This again is surely a reasonable way of expressing the Christian doctrine of the person of Christ, without raising the various metaphysical and psychological problems of the Trinity and the "two natures," of which to-day most students, even theological, fight shy, and not unnaturally, inasmuch as our primary concern must always be religion, and not theology, life, and not mere thought. It is the personal relation of your life towards Jesus Christ, in particular towards His mind and works, which matters; not your theory of His relations with God. I would not depreciate theology, but, after

all, our primary needs are the spirit, the values, the mind of Jesus Christ, as our surest and best approach to the unseen God with whom faith has to do. Religion for Jesus Christ is God, and that is why Christianity for us is Christ. I am not concerned here with other and secondary problems and doctrines, but with Christ's mind on the subject of the invisible God; I would focus all our attention upon this one point, in the belief that in the doctrine of God we have the whole of Christianity—all else is its implication and outcome. That is, if we can only attain to a vital and active faith in God—trusting, resting, venturing upon Him, giving Him thus free course to express Himself in us, looking upon all things in the light of His character and purposes, and losing all egoism, and all the fears and paralysis of egoism, in a perfect surrender to His will and to the concerns of His kingdom—then Christianity has given us all that it can, and all that we need. If we have the life, we can dispense with the theory of it as an essential, though we shall still find it a help, above all in expressing our faith to others. But a life centred in, and preoccupied with, the God of Jesus, has the whole secret of Christ and His Kingdom; and it is for such lives that the world to-day is inarticulately calling, not for theology and its apologetics, but for a life which is its own apologetic.

Is such a life reasonable? If we have

accepted the theory which underlies it in the Christian conception of God, we must accept the life itself in practice, or be branded as the associates of Pilate, the man who was afraid to act according to his judgment of truth, and so crucified the world's best friend, and thereby has become a byword for cowardice. I know that there is a point beyond which the ordinary man is afraid to go; he will accept as much of Christianity as he can without difficulty combine with his ordinary non-Christian principles in politics, business, and social life, but this compromise soon strangles even the element of Christian faith actually accepted. Christianity has, on the whole, lifted the world, not through its practical politicians, but through its men of vision, who, for the most part, left the practical politics to the God in whom they trusted.

THE PRACTICAL ISSUE

The real question is not so much—"Is the Christian belief in God reasonable?" as —"How much of it is reasonable?" and there no man can shirk the responsibility of individual judgment. But one thing is to me evident from the page of history, viz., that the best, and most helpful, and most triumphant life is that which has been fullest of God, and has approximated most nearly to the interpretation of Christ, and that the

uniqueness of Christ's own life stands or falls by its uniquely full and developed conception of God.

Judged, then, by its theory or its practice, its coincidence with man's aspirations, or its issue in goodness, individual or social, the Christian conception of God is surely a reasonable conception! But is it equally reasonable to all men? Expressed in Western forms, it is reasonable to the Western mind, but is it reasonable to the Eastern mind in this Western dress? Partly, no doubt, but missionaries are assuring us to-day that the East must make its own interpretation, or interpretations, of Christianity if it is to find its own Gospel, its own interpretation of Christ in particular, and of God as realised through Him. The East has not as yet contributed its quota to the theological explication of the Christian faith, or to the concrete practice of the Christian life. The wise men of the East have yet to lay their treasures at the feet of Jesus Christ, that the prophetic vision of the Nativity story may become an accomplished fact; and what is true of the East is also true of other parts of the globe, where the Christian mission has not yet planted firmly its feet. In other words, I do not believe that the Christian Gospel, and the Christian conception of God, which is its core, can be universally reasonable to the thought of man, till they have been universally known, and universally

stated ; and that day of promise is only dawning. To the mission work of our Church we must look for the coming of a greater age, when the knowledge of God shall indeed cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and when Christianity shall be able to make a universal appeal which shall be as reasonable as it is universal. But theorising and argument will never, of themselves, convert mankind. Life's problems are practical, and theory untested will carry us nowhere ; faith is to be proved, not in the study, but in life, not in dialectics, but in venture, and there is no possible substitute for the active faith of trust and self-denial, by which the soul of man and the society of men alike may be saved.

If we will only lean our full weight upon Christ's conception of God, we shall have the best possible proof, the only satisfactory proof of the reasonableness of our faith. Christ's teaching is not always easy to understand, it is full of "hard sayings" regarding God, and regarding those who are made in His image. The world and the Church have been afraid of it ; they have paid an extraordinary lip service to Christ, that they may escape the true service of imitation and obedience ; they have set Him apart from themselves, that they may feel free to set aside His teaching as too lofty for them ; they have changed the meaning of faith, not once, but often, that they may escape from that venture without which

it is dead. But the one thing we know is, that they have *failed*, and men to-day are beginning to realise that there is a connection between the Church's failure to do the works of Christ and its failure to reproduce the mind of Christ as regards God and man. As a church, we are beginning to feel that Christ's way is worth trying, and to understand, though dimly, that Jesus Christ was right after all, and that, even tested timidly in a small way, His programme works and His spirit triumphs. Modern methods, more in harmony with Christ's mind, in education, in social reform, in domestic politics, in international relations, and in our individual and collective life generally, are proving themselves to-day to be true; but they can only prove themselves when some one is found with courage to try them. Shall we dare to follow Christ, and, for the sake of the world and the Kingdom of God, to test and to prove His way of life, and His message of the Father on which it rests? God grant it.

The Second Question: Is it Necessary?

YESTERDAY I spoke of all Christianity as contained explicitly or implicitly in the Christian conception of God. The whole structure of Christian faith, in theory and practice, in individual and social relations, is to be found in the conception of God as revealed in and by Christ. When I ask, then, if this conception of God be necessary for human life, I am really asking if Christianity is necessary. A man's idea of God is a confession of his whole outlook in life, of his values, his ideals, his hopes and fears, and his realised resources; and the Christian conception of God is, therefore, simply a compendium of Christianity.

Now, is this Christian conception of God, which we have seen cause to believe reasonable, necessary? We all believe in hundreds of things as reasonable, which have no direct value or necessity for us, and it is further possible, as I shall have occasion to point out to-morrow, to believe a thing reasonable without believing it true. I believe it reasonable to hold that Mars is inhabited, but I do not yet know anything which makes the belief necessary for me, nor do I know anything which demonstrates it to be actually true. Theoretical reasonableness is not enough to accept regarding Christ's

view of God, and men know well that three further questions will, and must, be asked :

Is it necessary ?
Is it true ?
Is it final ?

ITS NECESSITY FOR THOUGHT

First, is it necessary for thought—intellectually necessary ? Men have often tried to prove that the belief in God was logically necessary for man's thought, and the history of theology has given birth to four great arguments for the existence of God, which aim at showing that the conception is necessary according to the constitution of human thought, *i.e.* that it is the necessary explanation of things as we know them. I shall not dwell at length upon these arguments, but briefly they are these :—

The first is the cosmological argument from cause and effect, which carries the human mind up a chain of causes to a first cause—an uncaused cause. The second is the teleological argument, which starts from the evidences of purpose and design in the ordered world around us, both external and inward, and carries the human mind back to a directing, arranging, and purposing intelligence. The third is the ontological argument, which starts from the bare conception of God itself, and attempts to show that the idea or ideas concerned are

necessary and self-evidencing for the human mind, as an integral part of human thought ; the fact of God, the unity of God, the perfection of God, are claimed to be the implicit standards of our thought, and imbedded in our thinking all the time, whether realised or not. The fourth is the moral argument, based not on pure but practical reason, which starts from the moral sense of man, the sense of obligation and of moral ideals or goals, as arguing a God who is the creator and governor of the moral order, of our sense of its reality, its demands and its objectives, and of the power to attain moral ends.

But the attempt to prove the doctrine of God intellectually necessary has not been able to prove it logically or mathematically so. In all our proofs there is a gap ; faith may jump it, as hypothesis in science, but it is there. The idea of causation itself is, since Hume's day at least, a faith ; but the postulating of a first cause, while not necessary in a purely logical scheme, is necessary at least in this sense, that only so can our minds find rest or satisfaction in the survey of the interminable chains of apparent causes and effects.

The argument from design or purpose is inevitable in the case of those who find design and purpose at every turn in their own thought, and, whether the belief be a projection of oneself or not, we cannot think sanely apart from it. It is not logically necessary to hold

that arrangement and adaptation of means to ends argue intelligence, but only so can the mind feel satisfied. The mind of man instinctively knows that cosmos is sane, and chaos incongruous, belief in God reasonable, and atheism absurd. A man can actually be sophisticated by abstraction and specialisation into discussing, and even under contradiction championing, the possibility of all the harmony and arrangement and mutual fitness of things being accidental coincidence; but no one believes it, and the teleological argument for God in some form or other is the belief of all sane minds. Here again our faith is not absolutely necessary as logic, but is practically necessary to satisfying our minds.

The ontological argument is peculiarly weak logically, but very strong æsthetically or intuitively; logically an idea cannot prove itself, but æsthetically the idea of unity amid all the diversity with which our minds are distracted, the idea of perfection amid all the imperfection, error and failure which comprise our experience, and the idea of absolute and immutable being behind all the flux of things and all the relative interdependences of life in which no stability or terra firma is to be found, give to our minds a feeling of rest and satisfaction, for which, for some good reason, nature has made them cry out. The ontological proof, then, if not logically convincing, meets and fits a need in our natures which

nothing else can ; it is in so far necessary to thought, and in some form or other it appears in every attempt theist, agnostic, or atheist to understand and interpret life and nature.

In his great criticism of these three earlier proofs for the existence of God, Kant attacks their logical necessity, and on the whole shakes it seriously, but he fails to note that their real cogency is the æsthetic or intuitive satisfaction which they bring. They clear up our mind, satisfy its unrest, and meet its fundamental gropings after truth in a way which no other conceptions do. But the strangest commentary upon Kant's criticism is that furnished by his own great argument, the moral, which he thought to substitute for the earlier three, but which he only added to them. For here too there is no logical necessity for a proportion between ideal and attainment, between obligation and ultimate being or ultimate success. Kant himself has here taken a jump, to which he has been urged by an æsthetic sense of the ultimate fitness of things, an intuitive, not a logical, compulsion of his thought ; that is, he himself stands where his opponents stand, not on logic, the superficial systematised knowledge of the conscious mind, but on something deeper and most insistent, the ultimate values of sanity, proportion, and "right reason" (as the Stoics called it).

Let us then admit at once that, if we use

"logic" in the sense of mathematical demonstration, our conception of God is not logically necessary, but it does appear to be necessary in a deeper sense, for harmony and peace of mind and satisfaction of the depths of our æsthetic and moral natures, and this peace seems to be requisite to practical usefulness. The atheist and agnostic have merely truncated and partial conceptions of God, not unified but chaotic, not systematised but isolated and fragmentary, but God none the less. The man who denies God, but talks of nature, means God; the man who talks of moral principles means God; the man who talks of æsthetic values means God; for the conceptions of nature, of principle, of value, are merely conceptions of the unseen, without unity, system, or cosmos; in other words, such a man has a poorer, less regulated, and less organised theism. Even in articles by agnostics I have read explicit admissions of their own failures to think without introducing God in some form; in other words, the reality of the conception of God, leaving aside its form, is necessary to our thought; and that necessity is not the superficial necessity of abstract logic, but the deeper necessity of concrete life, with powers and visions all eluding our definition, but finding in the thought of God satisfaction and peace, and, through its unifying, systematising and clarifying influence, a greater power for practical concerns. It is men of positive

faith who do things in this world, and so the conception of God is necessary to give our minds that measure of satisfaction and peace in which alone positive work can be accomplished efficiently and well ; that is, its necessity is not theoretical, but practical.

The Christian faith in God is necessary in measure for the thought of all men, and in a full measure for those who would make much of life in its length and breadth. The better the life, the more necessary is a full and definite conception of God ; and for the best life, the life of Jesus Christ, the idea of God is everything.

So far, I have attempted to show that the Christian conception of God is necessary for the satisfaction, peace and harmony of man's intellectual faculties ; it alone can give him that rest of mind which enables him to direct his energies from speculative problems, that hinder his usefulness owing to the disharmony of his mind, to the practical problems of life. This fact is written large on the page of history. The reason why philanthropic or other practical service of mankind has been rendered chiefly by believers, is, that their minds have been at peace, and so enabled to give all their energies to external problems, in place of wasting them in inward debate and the torture of dim questionings. For a useful life constructive thinking is necessary, and constructive thinking is not possible to any large degree

till a man has found mentally some rest for the sole of his foot, some foundation which does not require to be relaid every few minutes.

Thus the conception of God is not only reasonable, but necessary, for the best life, as the condition of practical usefulness and power. The believer stands on a rock from which he can help others; the unbeliever in a bog from which it takes all his efforts to save himself. I am not condemning honest doubt, which is a stage of most sincere thinking; but an indefinite continuance of the doubting stage is certainly not a blessing but a curse. Doubt may free a man from wrong conceptions, and enable him to attain better; but a long continuance in doubt means paralysis of life, disharmony of personality, and destructive habits of thought which warp and enfeeble life in every aspect. The challenge of doubt is often a blessing; but the acceptance of doubt is a morbid mental condition, the condition of a man who has thrown up the sponge. Positive thinking can rest nowhere but in God, and for a useful, self-evidencing and worthy life some vital conception of God seems to be necessary.

ITS NECESSITY FOR HEALTH OF MIND AND BODY

But mental peace has other sides to it which are also of importance. In the first place,

peace means mental and physical health; dispeace, distraction, and worry mean ill-health; and here we come to one of the most striking of the values of faith in God as tested in life. Let me first say that the word "necessary," applied to the conception of God, must be taken in the same sense as in other connections. For example, food is "necessary," but a man need not eat, and might live for a considerable time without food; *i.e.* "necessary" does not mean "compulsory," but only "required for continued and satisfying life." Viewed in this way, we find the Christian idea of God necessary in relation both to inward life and to outward activity. A sceptical writer, in an article I read some time ago, admitted that unbelief was hard; and stated his conviction that, if the term of life were indefinitely prolonged, men would sooner or later become believers or madmen. That is, he believed that between unbelief and insanity there stood only the brevity of life, and that disbelief in God could not maintain itself, but must cause mental breakdown. It is an interesting admission, and one which seems true as tested in actual fact, viz., that not merely for mental peace, but for mental health, which rests upon that peace, faith is essential. The proof is quite obvious on all hands. The issues of ill-health for an invalid are largely determined by his confidence or optimism. Far more people are

killed by loss of faith than by infection or injury. Optimism is always faith, sometimes explicit and realised, sometimes implicit and intuitive only, faith in the ultimate goodness in some form, which is at bottom faith in God. For permanent physical health the belief in God, above all in Christ's form of it, is all-important. For mental health the same belief means ultimately everything. Hence the extraordinary efforts which man's reason has put forth to establish the doctrine logically and remove it from the sphere of faith—unavailing efforts in the search after certainty, but most significant, and by no means unavailing as providing man with a reasonable presumption which makes his faith a rational thing.

But deeper than the mind is the soul, the seat of spiritual intuitions and impulses, and the source of our moral sense. Here we touch the very foundation of our nature which manifests itself in our moral judgments and moral ideas, immediate things which we cannot analyse, but by which our lives stand or fall, and by which we are judged every day. This inward judge, the conscience, leads us at times very close to the mouth of hell, and fear seizes upon us, not fear of external punishment nor of God so much as fear of ourselves, horror and remorse at our own past lives revealed to us in their moral nakedness and truth, and with these things the dread of future failure and self-contempt, and we are torn by

spiritual dispeace and torment. This sense of conviction of sin, which is one of the most real experiences in life, and which seems to be very much a forestalling in this life of judgment and hell, that we may even here pass beyond their power, can only be healed—such is the witness of religious experience—by confession and faith. In confession immoral suppressions are removed, and sin brought to the fresh air, in which it dies ; but, for the sensitive soul, repentance and confession are not enough ; they may indeed cancel somehow the guilt of sin as a personal thing, but what about its effect on others ? It is here that the belief in God becomes an essential to the best life, and to the healing of the soul, for the Christian conception of God is that of a loving and omniscient Being, bearing Himself wittingly all the responsibility of man's transgressions, not merely their guilt, but their consequences. Under the weight of conscious sin, I know of no sure escape for the rational, sensitive spirit of man from the burden of responsibility, except the way of faith in God, whereby a man can roll the burden upon God, in the faith that God has actually borne the full responsibility of his sin, its guilt, its venom, and its consequences. In this way I believe faith in God to be necessary to the best life on its spiritual side. The Christian conception of God gives us a Father who cares for us even in our sin, and seeks to condemn

it and yet save us; who has foreseen our sin, and made the wrath of man to praise Him, by putting it into His scheme of things, and overruling it for the purposes of love, so that out of evil shall come forth good.

Christ's teaching of the omnipotence and omniscience of God, which encompass even the life of the birds or the flowers, is the only teaching in which the soul of man, tortured by the contact between good and evil in his own dual nature, can find spiritual rest. And, above all, this conception is true because God is the inclusive ALL; all our sins against others are sins against Him; all our sins against ourselves are sins against Him; and, if we have His forgiveness, we have both our own and our neighbour's, whether we or our neighbour actually rise to our opportunity or no. It is God only with whom we have to do—self and the All; and this simplifies the whole question of life's relationships, and makes us dependent, not on imperfect and variable human nature, but on immutable and perfect goodness. So we can say, in the words of the Psalmist:

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned," [1]

since our relation to God implicitly includes and overrides all other relationships. Thus the conception of God simplifies life, while it

[1] Ps. li. 4.

strengthens and purifies it. It is the life of God against which all sin is directed, and the individual relationships are only the points in which our relation to God is found and expressed. "If a man loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ?" Christ's conception of God is thus the solution, not only of our intellectual, but of our moral and spiritual problems, and is necessary to the full and healthful development of our lives in all their aspects. It was because Luther had found peace, and so found his feet set upon a rock, that he was able to do what he did for the world. Peace gave him power, it freed his energies for practical service, and it brought to him that harmony of mind which is the condition of the best work, and of the continued health of body, mind, and spirit. Whether, then, we think of the relation of faith to health of body and mind, or of the relation of internal harmony to usefulness and constructive work, or of the relation of the sense of a full forgiveness, which truly cancels the past, to a developed and free spiritual activity of life, we see at each point how the conception of God given to us by Christ is the foundation, and the only satisfactory foundation, of the best, freest, fullest, and most useful life.

IS IT NOT ENOUGH TO BE A DECENT CHAP?

I come now to the less definite, and less comprehending, criticism of the Christian demand for faith, made, not by serious thinkers, but by the ordinary man of the street, who is not greatly interested in what is called religion. He is not convinced that the Christian belief in God is necessary for him, and his scepticism appears in such questions as:

"Is it not enough to be a decent chap?"
"Is it not sufficient to play the game?"

These are, of course, serious questions, and quite sensible, at least at first sight; but a very little criticism will show us how hopelessly superficial the view which they take of life actually is. We cannot so easily get rid of the factor of environment as these questions would suggest, an environment in which the Christian conception of God has been one of the most creative agencies for good; and the questions really embody a great illusion for the most part, though in some cases of their use they stand for the much more vital question:

"Is not Paganism really superior to Christianity?"

Let me illustrate the first point by reference to the Deistic movement in the eighteenth century. In that movement we have the setting up, over against Christianity, of a so-

called Natural Theology, which, it was held, was the normal belief of the unwarped human mind, a belief in a good God—in reward and punishment according to moral choices, in immortality, and the like. A fairly strong and able school of thinkers decried Christianity, and exalted their new teaching, which they believed to be but the true belief of unsophisticated human minds. But the movement petered out—and why ? Because it had no independent existence ; it was a parasite living on Christian faith and influence, which had created an environment impregnated with the conceptions of God and of spiritual things. Natural Theology was a great illusion, a ghost, a shadow of the Christianity around it ; and its partisans assumed that what they found in their Christian environment was not Christian in origin, but merely human. It was a great and instructive mistake, and one which was soon discovered when the real challenges of materialism and agnosticism were launched against the Church in the century which followed. Natural Theology was an incomplete and depotentiated Christianity. And when men to-day speak of "playing the game," of being "a decent chap," and the like, they are thinking in terms borrowed largely from our Christian, or at least semi-Christian, environment, created originally by Jesus Christ's life and influence, and directly by the Church which professes to follow and interpret Him

to men. The unconscious debt of the "decent chap" to Christianity is very obvious to anyone who will analyse his life and standards of conduct, for these rest upon institutions and systems of ideals created largely by the Christian consciousness of the past. I take it that "decent chap" is only a more colloquial way of expressing "good man," though one is tempted to think that the phrase refers often to complaisant good nature, so called, which avoids all that is unpleasant, rather than to the real goodness with moral backbone, which refuses the line of least resistance. But those who ask whether it is not enough to be a decent chap, mean, on the whole, a man who does his duty and takes no mean advantage of his fellowmen, that is, a good man in the ordinary meaning of the word. Unfortunately, the phrase is weak in its power of connoting character, as the word "decent" is so vague.

But taking it as it stands, "Is it sufficient to be a decent chap?" Must not a man aim at being the most decent chap possible? In other words, if there are grades of "decentness," is it not necessary to the best life to aim at the highest? When a man says "it is enough to be a decent chap," he means, I think, that he can get the most out of life by such "decency" of life. If you could prove that he failed to do so, I think it would be obvious that the choice of that level of life was a lower choice, and so self-condemned;

and that, to get the most out of, and into, life, it was necessary to be more than a decent chap, to be, in fact, the most decent chap possible.

And so the question may be an unconscious rebuke of modern Pharisaism, as though the questioners said, "You are going to get to Heaven cheap, by the repetition of certain formulæ, which you have learned to utter and believe in. But we are not made that way. We cannot believe in your formulæ. Will it not do if we are decent chaps ?" Here, then, we have a pathetic hope that, not merely by dogmas, but by goodness *also*, men may climb the heights of Heaven ; a hope that is surely akin to the spirit of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and infinitely nearer the actual truth than the alternative suggested !

However, to go back a step, I have pointed out that the idea of a "decent chap," for most of those who use it in a Christian environment, means something very close to the Christian ideal, of which it is only a reflection or more unsubstantial ghost. But I wish now to point out that to be a Christian is to be the most decent chap possible, and that the Christian conception of God, of which all Christian ideals and character are implications, is, therefore, necessary to the best life possible to us ; and to choose consciously anything less than the best is the great ultimate treason to humanity. The Christian ideal of character

is found in Jesus Christ, and is that character which is built on, springs out of, and embodies in human life the Christian conception of God. Jesus Christ bids His followers, in the Sermon on the Mount, imitate the love, and patience, and thoughtfulness of God, that they may be the children of their Father which is in Heaven; and for the Christian all his goodness is the imitation and offspring of the character of God as interpreted by Christ.

CHRIST THE IDEAL OF MANHOOD

The Christian character revealed in Jesus is the noblest and fullest possible to man. In Him we have the greatest love and self-denial known to man, a love that stooped to the lowest depths even for utter strangers; the greatest humility and allowance of the rights of others; the greatest freedom and independence as against the traditions, or the might, of others; the greatest courage, physical and moral, where danger or misunderstanding had to be faced; the greatest self-control; the greatest sincerity; the greatest sense of justice, and of mercy triumphing over justice; the utmost faith in men and women; in a word, all the classical virtues, with others distinctively Christian which belong to His own world-challenging gospel.

There is not a shred of evidence to impair our estimate of His courage, His righteousness,

His self-control, His freedom ; and to these virtues of the Hellenic ideal He has added those which raise the Christian far above it—love and humility which knew no bounds, and which shrank from no self-expression as too menial or degrading. The pride of Hellenic ethics, the hard justice of Roman ethics, are overborne and condemned for ever by the love that stooped to the dust, and the humility that bore all things, because God Himself was such according to the view of Christ, patient, unfaltering, enduring love, that knew no respect of persons. The ethic preached and practised by Christ according to our gospel records is the greatest human history has known ; and if it be so, it is surely necessary to the best life, the life revealed in Christ and by Him made possible for man ! And inasmuch as the ethic of Christ is explicitly bound up, as in the Sermon on the Mount, with the character of God, we see that the Christian conception of God is necessary for anyone who would make the most of life, and get and give the best in the span of this short pilgrimage. Surely we may say that Jesus Christ is the decentest chap—to use, not irreverently, the phrase with which I have been concerned—the decentest chap we know of ; and that to be a decent chap on some other level is not sufficient, if it is possible, by taking Christ's mind about God to ourselves, to be a decenter chap still on a higher level ! When a higher

and lower are put before us, to choose the lower is to choose the evil, and with it, to choose hell in some sense. If Christianity be to you a higher thing than your own life as a "decent chap," then you must choose it, or fall under the condemnation of your God and your own conscience, which cannot be hoaxed into satisfaction with a second-best, and which will accuse you all day, and all your days, as a coward and a traitor to the highest. But perhaps you do not realise that Christ does stand so far beyond you, along the line of practical life. Perhaps you know little of Him one way or the other; perhaps you think He was a mere dreamer; perhaps you have got a wrong conception of Him.

As to the first point, ignorance about Christ is hardly excusable in an age and environment like this, and I can only advise you to change it for knowledge. As to the second point, if He was a mere dreamer, His castles in the air have grown their own foundations, and His dreams have fufillled themselves in so many ways that one is driven to think they are more probably the reality, and our vaunted common sense a dream, nay, a nightmare. As to the third point, it is easy to get a wrong idea of Christ, and Christian art and literature has a good deal to answer for in their painting of "the pale Galilean" with his weak and effeminate aspect; but that is merely mediæval misrepresentation, and, as George Bernard

Shaw has said, " ' Gentle Jesus, meek and mild ' is a snivelling modern innovation, with no warrant in the gospels." The healthy young carpenter of Galilee, who dared to court death in cold blood, who faced the misunderstandings, not only of His enemies, but of His friends, who purged the temple, and flouted the ecclesiastics, who dared to set His own thought of God above the sacred text, and to criticise freely both the religious and social presuppositions of His age, at the cost of a short and stormy ministry and a shameful death, who championed the poor, the oppressed, the outcast, against the leaders and the prejudices of respectable society, and dared to disappoint to the utmost His own nearest and dearest relations, disciples and friends—He was no weak man in any sense, but the embodiment of a perfect courage, often tried, but never failing. The legend of the effeminate Christ must not be allowed to stand between a man and the best of lives. Christ does indeed seem to have the strength of woman as well as of man, but He is the ideal of manhood, no matter at what point we touch His life as known to us. To know Christ is to-day an obvious duty, and to know Him means a choice between Christ and self, between good and evil, which cannot be evaded by any talk of being a " decent chap." To many men the phrase in question appeals because of its actual vagueness, while Jesus Christ's demands are clear and definite, but,

once the real issue has been faced, a man must either admit that his conception of a "decent chap" is Jesus Christ, or is on a lower level. Vagueness is of no use here, and we have to do with a definite personal choice—"What think ye of Christ?" Keep your ideal of the "decent chap" if it means being like Christ, but if it means something less than the best, an ideal more easily attained than that offered in Christ, you condemn yourself as coward and as traitor to the best you know, as the associate of Judas and Pilate, and the other trimmers of history, who have chosen amiss and been pilloried by the conscience of the world. In Christ you will find the perfect life, the denial of selfishness and of the easy downward paths of life, and the scaling of the heights of God in the service of others; and the secret and centre and source of this life is God Himself. The mind of Christ about God is thus necessary to the best life; all the moral values of all earth's religious or ethical systems are found in Christ and His thought of God, around which His life revolved; and in His intellectual sincerity and fearlessness, and in His æsthetic and utterly unascetic joy in life, and that appreciation of earth's beauties which is enshrined for ever in His parables and teachings, we find the same spirit and the same completeness of life. This God-centred life of Jesus Christ is our perfect example, not indeed in the letter which killeth, but in the spirit

which giveth life; and if we would follow Him in the life we must follow Him in our thought of the God behind it.

IS IT NOT SUFFICIENT TO PLAY THE GAME?

But another says, "Is it not sufficient to play the game?" Practically all the arguments I have used already apply here too. To "play the game" in a Christian environment probably is no more than a vague statement of the Christian ideal unconsciously borrowed; and, if "playing the game" were defined, it would often be very little different from practical Christian life as generally understood; but there are some things which one might say further with reference to the alternative proposed. In the first place it is extraordinarily vague, and seems to refer to the English public school spirit, and to conventions regarding the sportsmanlike playing of cricket, and so forth. "It's not cricket" is, in fact, another form of "It's not playing the game." The game to be played at all must have rules, and the moral value of the phrase will depend on these rules; and it is not the written laws of the game that are in question, but the unwritten laws, embodied in an English ideal of games, which is largely the product of a semi-Christian environment, and which, therefore, consists largely of Christian principles. All life is a game, and the real

question is, "What are the best rules, the truest and most worthy?"; and I submit that, in the game of life, the rules of the Christian, the unwritten principles of his playing, are better than any other set. Here we are reduced again to the Christian ethic as superior to other ethics; and, if a man by "playing the game" simply means playing the best of games in the best possible way, then I believe that this is no true alternative to Christianity, but a synonym for it.

However, if a man uses the phrase as an alternative—and to ask whether it is necessary to be a Christian, and necessary to accept the Christian doctrine of God, in this particular form, "Is it not sufficient to play the game?" suggests that there is actually a felt difference between Christianity and "playing the game"—he may mean that Christianity asks far too much in the way of acceptance of doctrines and the like, while he only wishes to be a good man and to do the best with his life, *i.e.* he has an objection to something theological or institutional in the Church, and in particular objects to accepting a metaphysical definition of God. Or again, it may mean that he has a fundamental antipathy to something in the Christian morality, and is at heart a pagan with a real grievance against Christian views.

Let us take the former case first, that of the man who is afraid of dogmas, has a healthy objection to the acceptance of metaphysical

phrases, which neither he nor any one else fully understands, and has the sincerity to desire that he shall profess nothing which he does not hold. His view is, of course, right, but he is mistaken in identifying Christianity or the Church with such dogmas as the essentials of the faith. The day is gone when dogmatic metaphysics are required of laymen. Clergymen, authorised to teach, must study and be interested, to some extent, in such things, and are expected to appreciate the dogmatic systems of past Christianity; but the ordinary Church member to-day need not take much stock in dogmas, for the Church has realised by now that Christianity is a way of life, not a theology, a way of life with a bare minimum of intellectual system. It is not possible to have a definite point of view in regard to life and conduct at all without some intellectual statement and comprehension of it; but the amount of metaphysics required to qualify for the name "Christian" is so small as to be practically negligible. The chief thing in Christianity, the chief test of, and qualification for, the name "Christian" lies in the attempt to follow Christ. Following Christ is not a thing of external acts, but an adoption of the mind of Christ, and in so far dogmatic in measure, both as regards God and man; but I have attempted in my last address to give a statement of Christian belief with a minimum of speculative doctrine, and

to show that the Christian faith is in essence a certain attitude towards all that exists, or the universe. So this objection, in the case of most men who push it, falls to the ground; to be a Christian is to "play the game" in the truest sense, and does not really mean the addition of an uncomprehended and unnecessary creed of a dogmatic or speculative kind. True Christianity is just as concrete, and just as little dogmatic, as the ideal of "playing the game," indeed it is that ideal in other words. To "play the game" you must have your definitions, rules, and so forth, and there is no real difference philosophically between the following of Christ and "playing the game," except that the former is less vague, and therefore more directly concrete and helpful, than the second.

The sporting spirit is simply another name for faith, as I defined it yesterday. Faith is the great adventure, the great gamble, the great romance; and Christianity means the best playing of the best game; and the rules of the game are those which we call the ethics of Christianity, found in the life of Jesus Christ, and founded upon the character of God which Christ preached.

THE CHALLENGE OF PAGANISM

But we come now to the second, and more serious, case of objection, the case of the man who asks if it is not sufficient to play the

game because he feels that Christianity asks what it has no right to ask; the man who has some deep-rooted antipathy to Christian ethics, and an open or a secret preference for a more pagan code. Let us admit at once that there is a serious element of fact to be faced here. It is not long since a prominent writer classed the English public school system as pagan and not Christian by reason of its ideals; and there are those who really prefer the English public school ideal of "playing the game," as the game is played there, with all its political, social, and ethical presuppositions —and these are not few—to the Christian ideal. We come here to the ever present challenge of paganism under the forms of certain prejudices or values, which we may class under the headings of a limited, and especially an imperialistic, patriotism, of aristocratic prejudices, and of a morality of egoistic pride.

"Playing the game" for many means a life given to the support of the British Empire, and the Christian refusal to look at any unit smaller than mankind is disliked; for such men internationalism and world brotherhood are in the second class of ideals as compared with British prosperity and the ascendancy of the Anglo-Saxon. For many, again, "playing the game" means loyalty to a class, with the belief that a benevolent aristocracy is better than the untutored and undisciplined democracy of the world as we

know it. The high ideals of feudal chivalry in the upper classes are prized as earth's greatest way of life, and the poor and ignorant are to be governed and exploited for their own good and the good of the world. The Christian insistence upon the equality of men as potentially, if not actually, true, is disliked, because of a genuine conviction, no doubt, that men are actually unequal, and that control ought to be in the hands of those who are educated, and have had the leisure to acquire high ideals.

For many, again, "playing the game" means keeping an unbroken and independent spirit under all circumstances, to save one's face, one's egoism, one's self-respect, one's pride. The Stoic ideal of man as *rex* or king; the Indian brave laughing at his tormentors, all the quintessence of that human pride that will not suffer itself to be humbled is a religion to not a few; and it is a strong and noble religion, but not the strongest, not the noblest; it is weak in its self-esteem, and in the fears which egoism brings with it; and Christ's example of humility and willingness to be ill-treated, and of power to feel with and for men, and yet to be unbeaten, is hated, partly because it is misunderstood, partly because it is feared, as all high ideals are by those who will not accept them.

Well, Christianity does not deny the good of patriotism, but, granting all its positives, it denies its negatives; it teaches that patriotism

should unite, and not divide ; it does not deny the good of aristocratic ideals and education, it only asks that they be extended to all men ; it does not deny personal strength and independence of external things, but it denies egoism and its fears, and teaches that the true independence springs from dependence on the unseen God, and that true strength is in the humility which is strong enough to stoop to any service without thought of shame. We have here the antithesis between egoism and altruism, between pride and humility, in their various forms ; and this pagan challenge of our modern school system, resting as it does on European militarism, must be met in the boldest way by a denial of its limited caste sympathies and its limited self-sacrifice, and by a proclamation of the higher laws of a higher game. Militarism, oligarchy, pride, suspicion, and the like, are prejudices born of a pagan standpoint, *i.e.* are a pre-Christian set of values, but the coming of Christ, and of a universal kingdom, knowing no ultimate distinction in country, colour, caste, status, or the like, has put them out of date ; and their following is a deplorable atavism, a putting back of the hands of the clock. And why are they wrong ? Because Jesus came preaching, believing, and living by a better conception of God, not a national deity, not a divine ordainer of caste, not a blind force demanding of man a Stoic impassiveness, but a Father,

whose children are all mankind, before whom class, national, and colour distinctions fade into nothingness, and who withal in selfless love, or self-giving, stoops to the uttermost, and calls us to a like spirit. The character of Jesus Christ springs out of the character of the unseen God; and all our highest morality and life are the implications of our Christian conception of God.

Paganism, Hellenic, Stoic, or modern, is not without its nobility; but in the light of Christianity it is darkness, it belongs to a lower order of things, and is doomed because the Christian conception of God is to-day necessary to man's best playing of the best game. Yes, our ideal is God interpreted in Christ; and the pagan objection is the objection of the reactionaries who would stem the world's progress, or of those whose knowledge of Christianity is inadequate and misleading. "Playing the game" will undoubtedly be attained best as an ideal by embodying in our lives the spirit and mind of Christ about the unseen and the seen.

THE CLAIM OF THE CHURCH

We come, then, to the conclusion that "to be a decent chap" and "to play the game" either mean Christianity or something less than Christianity; in either case we see the necessity of Christianity for the best life.

To call the lower ideal good means nothing ; for the good is often the enemy of the best, and, if in Christianity we have a better, it alone is truly good for us, since all good and evil are relative things. It is not enough to juggle with vague phrases, even though they sometimes represent a healthy reaction against a morbid pietism ; we must be clear about these matters. The issues are : Shall we be the best, or less than the best open to us ? For the best life—and no other is worthy of consideration by "decent chaps" who wish to "play the game"—Christianity is necessary, *i.e.* Christ's mind about God and men, and the way of life in which it found its natural expression.

So we see that for satisfaction and peace of mind, for stable and enduring mental health, for quietness and power of spirit, for practical efficiency, and for the fulfilment of the noblest ideals of man, however conceived, the religion of Jesus Christ, His mind and His works, His faith and His way of life, are essential things. Beside that ideal all else is a second-best which is doomed to destruction, and can to-day give us neither peace nor power. God known in Christ is the one and only satisfaction of our needs, and for all true and permanent life vitally necessary. May we have grace to enter into our inheritance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let me, in conclusion, raise one further

point:—Is it necessary to belong to the Church, in which Christianity is officially recognised, and of which the Christian faith in God through Christ is the basis and bond? Many to-day, lumping the Church with its failure and its shame, which things are but by-products of what the Church really is and does, wish to have nothing to do with it. Let me briefly give you reasons for holding it necessary for the best life to join the Church, concerning which I may say that I should agree with most of your criticisms.

In the first place, the environment and social fellowship of like-minded people cannot be dispensed with by any who seek the best life. That is one message both of the modern psychology and of common sense, and I leave it at that. Secondly, the Church stands for positive things, it is an instrument with definite ideals, and with great potentialities for positive service; no free-lance can have the same power as a regiment or army; and the Church at the worst is not dead yet, but capable of being transformed by good men to something better and more useful than it has ever been.

Thirdly, the utter destruction of the Church is practically impossible, as it is the cement of our social fabric, and its reformation, which *is* practical politics, must, according to the evidence of history, almost certainly come from within; therefore if you have any positive

enthusiasm for goodness, get in and help to change it, rather than stand by and criticise. Almost every great religious reformer of the Christian era has been a member of the Church, and nearly always a minister or official in it. Wicklif, Huss, Luther, Knox, Wesley, and so forth, these were all official teachers of the Church, and they have done most to help it to better things. The *National Dictionary of Biography* gives an extraordinary, and altogether unsolicited, testimony to the positive and constructive power of the Christian Church, and especially of the Christian ministry, in producing great men in every branch of human usefulness. The sons of British clergymen, for example, are far ahead of all others in their percentage of the world's great men, and it is almost amazing to note how many of the teaching staff of any university —take, for example, this of Belfast—are sons of the Church's manses and rectories. If you want to do the greatest good you can with your life, you will find the Church of help; and if you wish to help the Church, that it may once more lay the world under its debt, as in ancient, mediæval and Reformation days, you will get into its ranks, and seek its reconstruction, so far as you demand it, from within. No instrument men ever created has the same *potencies* for positive and constructive work in the world as the Christian Church, and for good-intentioned and thoughtful men to-day

to follow the line of least resistance by staying without it, is to surrender the citadel of civilisation to poorer, weaker men, and to leave it, in a day of great problems, to the tender mercies of the most unenlightened and most unchristian elements within it. For your own sake, for the Church's sake, and for the world's sake, keep as closely in touch with it as you can, if you would make the most of your life; and let us all aim at making the Church a better interpreter and a truer reflection of its divine Author and Guide, even the God whom Jesus Christ has declared to us, and who is like Jesus Christ.

The Third Question: Is it Effective?

WE come now to a very practical question regarding our conception of God as gathered from Jesus Christ. Granted that it is reasonable and necessary in theory for thought and life, is it actually true? Does it work when tested? Is it effective in practice? Does it prove itself by results? Is it justified by its works? The practical or pragmatic test of faith is in the foreground to-day, since men have realised how imperfect and limited is all our thinking, based on imperfect and limited knowledge as it is, and how often theory fails to approve itself in practice; and experience is for most people to-day the final test.

VERIFICATION AND VENTURE

We have here a serious question, though it is the question of a weak faith, of a timorous mind; for the obvious answer is: If you are a brave man, try it and see. But most of those who have not seriously tried it wish to have some reasonable expectation of satisfactory results before they do so. The conception has to be tested some time, and its author, Jesus Christ, tested it to the full in His own great adventure of faith, and because

of Christ the way is easier for all who follow Him, but still men ask the old questions :— Is it true ? Will it bear my weight if I lean on it ? There is no final or perfectly convincing answer except the answer of experience, and that needs courageous and honest men. *Solvitur ambulando.*

You have, in the Christian view of God, an interpretation of the universe, reasonable and satisfactory for your thought, necessary for the best life, tested and proved by Jesus Christ, and in measure by countless of His followers ; but you still ask for a little more persuasion before you risk your all upon it. And God is very gentle with the timorous soul; He does not quench the smoking flax, the smouldering tinder of our faith. He gives us more help than we have the right to expect, and, knowing our frailty, He makes the way easy for us, as easy, at least, as it can be made with a due consideration for our lasting good. He shows us as much as love can with safety show us, in the way of example and proof, but He cannot make our faith sight, or our heroism mere prudence, without destroying the things which matter most in life. Therefore, faith is still venture, and we must have courage to take the forward step of faith in the unseen but eternal realities of our lives. There is a gamble, a venture upon hypothesis, a step of heroic faith, in all upward movement of life.

An egg-collector, scaling the cliffs for sea-bird's eggs, found himself once in a position from which ascent and descent were equally perilous. Some friends lowered a rope, and it hung some six inches beyond his utmost reach. It was stout, and he could trust it; he could trust his own muscles and intelligence; but still he hesitated to jump the necessary six inches. Why? Because, though the risk was small, it was *a life risk*. But it soon presented itself as practically necessary, so he jumped and was drawn into safety. It is a parable of life and faith. Everywhere we are faced by the jump, small, but in essence a life risk; and being here creatures of a day, with work to do and with powers to accomplish it, hesitation, if prolonged, brands us only as cowards. We must jump, we must trust, for "He that will save his life shall lose it." Kelvin tells us that in his constructive work he was always conscious of a chasm between his logic and his hypothesis. To reach his hypothesis he had to leap in the dark; and by his leaps mankind has been blessed and his name has won honour. In all religion, in all life, there is the venture to be made; and Christianity is indeed the true satisfaction and rationale of the sporting instinct, and even of the gambling habit, which is but a meaner and more perverted form of the same thing. We look for safety before all else; but stagnation, decay, gangrene, atrophy, death—these

are the rewards of seeking safety first. Seek ye first the Kingdom of Heaven, and all else of value shall be added. There is no security save in self-sacrifice, self-surrender. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is our interpreter of God; and the faith that overcometh the world is utter faith in God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yet God gives us not a little help towards realising both the need and the efficacy of such a faith. Let us look at a few of these helps in attempting to answer the question: Does Christ's view of God work?

THE WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

First we see that it was effective, it worked, in the life of Christ Himself, the author of the Christian faith and the Christian experience. The Gospels give us the picture of an extraordinary life as lived in the faith of God, and in the power that such faith brought. Everywhere we find the character of Christ as the outcome of His thought of God. His fearlessness, physical, moral, and intellectual, rests upon His belief in the love and absolute providence of the Father. His efficiency and power to help others, with no thought of hunger or weariness, or the like, rests upon His surrender of all self, and the fears of self, to the love or selfless concern of Another, greater and better able to watch over His life. His miracles are the evident response of a Father's power

to a faith great enough to expect the unusual, and openly to challenge God's grace for needy human hearts and lives. His great ventures of faith, in His temptations, in His agony, in His death, rest upon His faith in the purposes, the wisdom, and the overruling of the unseen God; and the Resurrection and Pentecost, or the rock of assurance and the baptism with power of the early Church, are but instances of God's answers to the faith of His well-beloved Son. In all points He was tempted like as we are, and yet without sin, because He knew and cared only for God and the things of God. And Christ's faith in God was paralleled by an extraordinary faith in men, the children made in the divine image.

The phenomenal success of the early Church, beginning so inauspiciously in a despised and out-of-the-way corner of the world, with a message which was a stumbling-block to the thought of the day, as it still is in large measure, was another remarkable evidence of the effectiveness and power of Christ's faith in God. Yet, great as was the triumph of early Christianity, it seems hardly to have been as great as was Christ's vision for it. The weakness of the Church in all ages has been a great disappointment compared with the expectations of its Master; but the call to a better faith is still with us, and we may, even in this generation, rise to a vision and a power

unknown as yet in the history of the Church—*if* we will. Christ's leaving of His mission to die, by drinking the cup He did not understand, and from which He prayed to be delivered if it might be God's will, was the supreme venture of a faith which chose death rather than life, spiritual vision rather than logic; and it called for some one who might continue the work, other than the ignorant and misunderstanding Twelve. Again His faith was answered in the appearance of Stephen and of Paul his greater successor.

Did Paul's faith in God through Jesus Christ work? Yes! the record of his labours is a record of extraordinary triumph and enthusiasm, of phenomenal and varied activity, and of imperishable influence. Nothing but a living faith could have carried a man through all that he did and suffered:—

> "In labours abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one, thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." [1]

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 23-28.

Nothing but conviction could have faced all that, and more of which we know later; and conviction rests on experience, on the daily proving of faith. Paul's epistles are full of this testing of his faith, and of the power and the joy which it brought with it. He knew whom he had believed, and he knew that it was in weakness that he was strong. God's power could not come through egoism, it could come only through self-surrender; it could not come through pride, but through the knowledge of his frailty and need of God. And who was Paul? A man who had lost caste with the classes to become the friend of the masses, an invalid often, perhaps a chronic invalid, a man of insignificant appearance, but a man whose faith centred in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. And his continual message in varying forms was:—"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ." It is this mind of Christ which is our Christian test of life, and our best interpretation of the unseen God. Paul's energy and power were a continual witness to the faith in which he lived of divine fatherhood and human sonship realised in Jesus Christ. His epistles are not mere theorising, but are transcripts of experience, and are full of this daily verifying of his faith.

THE WITNESS OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY

And what is true of Paul is true of thousands known and unknown to us throughout the ages. The saints and martyrs of the Church unite in the same confession of the effectiveness of our faith in actual life—

> "Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
> Is He sure to bless?
> Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs
> Answer, 'Yes!'"

The history of the martyrs, for example, is a story of human weakness transformed into strength—by what? By the thought of God in Christ upon which they leaned their souls. And it worked; sometimes in ways we understand, sometimes in ways we do not yet understand. Insensibility to physical pain and discomfort, amazing cures, astounding feats of physical and mental endurance, and unlooked for transformations of character, mark the whole pathway of the saints of God. The age of miracles is never past, though we are learning to understand more and more of the powers that faith can awaken as the years pass, and as God shows us still more of His truth. One thing is clear, that we cannot put limits to the power of God appropriated by faith. To-day men are accepting as reasonable cures scoffed at some years ago, and in a few centuries more we shall laugh at the limited knowledge

which limited God in place of acknowledging its own limitations.

Yes! faith in God works, and sometimes in ways which we cannot yet comprehend, but which are not the less true on that account. We must believe in miracles, or believe Christ a myth, and the New Testament a forgery. If we allow its full weight to historical evidence, rather than prejudging everything by our own preconceptions and knowledge, we must admit the existence of unexplained works of God in every age since Christ. Whether we shall come to understand them all or not, as we are to-day coming to understand some, matters little; what matters is that Christian faith has proved God to be sufficient for all emergencies, and that the conception of God given us by Christ works even here and now, when we venture upon it. Christian biography is full of the unexpected from the worldly standpoint, but not the unexpected to faith. Above all in the records of Christian prayer biography gives us a very clear proof of the effectiveness of our faith, when self has been surrendered, and the will of God made the norm of life. The story of George Müller of Bristol, whose faith for his orphan children even in extremity was not disappointed but honoured so repeatedly by God; the story of Hudson Taylor, who built up the China Inland Mission upon half a crown and faith; the stories of many of the

pioneer missionaries, such as J. G. Paton of the New Hebrides, who came through seemingly impossible situations in the power of God—such a witness is uniform among the heroic souls of the Church at home or abroad.

A worried doubter who went in despair to the great New England bishop, Phillips Brooks, came out a new man, and told his friends that it was not argument he needed, but contact with a triumphant spirit, *i.e.* with a living faith. And what was the spirit and the faith of Phillips Brooks? It was faith in God through Jesus Christ; and Phillips Brooks' message to the world is this, in his own words—

> "Do not pray for easier lives, pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers, pray for powers equal to your tasks."

i.e. accept the tasks, and *expect* the powers. If we lean upon God as conceived by and through Jesus Christ, we shall find, and do find, ourselves borne up as the swimmer is borne upon the sea. The testing of the unseen is the honouring of God; and "whoso honoureth Me, I will honour." The faith of the Christian in the character and resources of God is being verified in every generation, and every day. Read, and keep your eyes and ears open, and you will know that it is so, unless you have determined not to know it.

THE WITNESS OF PRESENT EXPERIENCE

And the testimony of Christian experience is still what it has been in all centuries. We can experience the power of God to-day as surely as those of former times. Yea! we who are called by the name of Christ still can and do speak "that we do know."

We know in very fact that God can break a man's fetters, the fetters of besetting sin and recurrent temptation, the fetters of ignoble desire or of an unworthy spirit. We know that God can give a man a new spirit, a new power, a new enthusiasm for the things that are clean and true and noble, which is able to drive out the old life and its works, not indeed all at once perhaps, lest we should not prize that which cost us nothing, but surely and continually. We know that God can give a man victory over fear, for fear is the outcome of self, and victory over self means the decay and destruction of the roots of fear.

In an age of questioning doubt, one of the great fears is the fear of disaster through facing the truth; but we know that God is Truth, and that He can enable a man to be sincere and unafraid to face things to the bottom, and to overcome. The darkness of doubt may be the prelude of dawn if a man will trust in the God of all truth, and stake his whole mental life upon the belief that the pathway

of truth and sincerity, for all its apparent danger, leads not to hell, but away from it, not from God, but to His very presence. Men sometimes are afraid to think, lest they be lost for ever; they ride at anchor, fearing the high seas of truth and venture; but we know that God, the author of truth, can give the victory, and does, both over fear and over error, if a man will trust Him.

We know that God can lead a man safely through the fires of hell upon earth, through the judgment day of self-realisation and conviction of sin, when the floods seem to threaten our destruction, and the pit yawns for our souls; for we know that the judgment day which does not come here must come beyond, that all self-realisation is for good, not for evil, and that we can trust God in all our need, and find His power in the night.

And so with the other aspects of life. In the Christian biography of our day the proof is so obvious of God's love and purposes that I am continually amazed that it does not convince many more people; but, finding in my own heart the continual temptation to unbelief, even when faith seems ninety-nine per cent. justified by events, I understand that there is no conviction apart from the will and the surrender of self. The hypothesis of Christian life which we call our conception of God is proved continually in experience. God still gives to man the power to face any

passion, any fact, any fear, any circumstance, if man will yield himself to the all-embracing love and power which are seeking him. In our weakness His strength is made perfect; and few indeed ever learn the lesson of faith till they have seen their weakness and their need of divine strength, till they have learned in the valley of humiliation and suffering that egoism is not the way, but God, and, putting self aside, affirm the eternal Love as their life and their God.

This our faith, then, I believe to be effective in every sphere of life, intellectual, moral, or physical; it can break every fetter of the soul. Sincerity knows that it is strong, and sincerity is faith in truth, and in the power of truth to preserve the soul. Courage knows that it is strong, and courage for rational minds is faith in God's overruling providence, and in the value of things unseen. Trust is the way of peace, and so of efficiency, and it rests upon faith in what we cannot touch or handle. Out of egoism is born fear, and out of fear most of the ills and sins that humanity knows, with ill-health of body, mind and soul. Faith is the denial of fear, the affirmation of the positive goodness of the world, and all that underlies it. And faith is power, for faith is man's union with God, the source of all might and all good; and the greater the faith the greater the power. In the life of Christ we see that the greatest faith and the greatest

power, physical and spiritual, go hand in hand. The physical miracles of Christ and the moral miracles of His being are the counterpart of His unswerving trust in God, and He taught His followers this truth, with no qualifications —"All things are possible to him that believeth, *for* with God all things are possible." Christ expected His followers to do the same works as He did Himself, and for a while the Church lived in an atmosphere of such faith, and with such a baptism of power ; but the Church lost its vision, its trust in the unseen, and its power ; it began to put its trust in the seen and temporal, and the tragedy of unfaith soon came upon it in physical and spiritual powerlessness. Here and there are gleams of light in the darkness as a great soul passes through our common days to the life beyond by the way of Christ so little trodden, the way of immediate trust and fellowship ; but, until to-day, "failure" is the verdict of honest men, not upon Christ, but upon the Church which has professed His name. There are signs of the stirring of the dead bones to-day, and hope is with us again, hope founded on the knowledge of our weakness, in which God's strength may be made perfect ; but we have not yet reached the days of triumphant faith, only as yet of tentative and timorous venture. The gospel of Christ is clear about God, His love, His wisdom, His power, but modern theology on the whole is uncertain, because it is only

theoretical where Christ was practical, it is speculating where Christ was living.

THE TWO WAYS TO CHRISTIAN POWER

Let us now consider the two chief ways in which the Christian conception of God becomes effective in life. The first is by suggestion (one of the catchwords of our day, and deservedly so). Doctors have assured us from their personal knowledge of psychotherapy that the best results are obtained by what is called "theotherapy," or healing by the suggestion and consciousness of God, and of what He is. The suggestion of health has a great deal less power when divorced from religion than when it is definitely associated with religious beliefs and forms—such is the experience of experts. As one prominent writer has said, "The safest mind cure is the thought of God"; and all religious life or experience is full of psychotherapy, and in particular of theotherapy. God gives unity, coherence, definition and power to our principles and aspirations (which in themselves are a confession of faith either in God, or gods, that is, in the unseen but eternal things); and by dwelling on the idea of God in its varied aspects and meanings we grow in spiritual life and power. Suggestion is perhaps the most powerful weapon for good in the world as we know it; and in the category of suggestion the idea of

God ranks first as the fullest and most potent of all the means of suggestion. In God we visualise and make real for life *all* our principles and ideals of good *at once*; God includes them all, and more, and dwelling consciously in His presence, especially in our times of private prayer or public worship, we grow stronger, purer, braver, calmer, humbler, more patient, more confident, and more unselfish. As we dwell upon His great unselfishness, kindness grows in our hearts; as we dwell upon His patience and His goodness, there comes a great humility. His omnipotence gives us confidence, His wisdom calms our worry and fear, His purity rebukes our sin, His love condemns our hate and shames our treacherous hearts, His truth strengthens our sincerity, His immutability gives us assurance, His beauty makes us fall down and worship. Thus belief works by suggestion, and its success verifies our belief; otherwise we must hold the absurd view that untruth is in harmony with nature. That which works must, for common sense, spring out of truth; and Christ's conception of God works. The better the conception of God, the surer its verification in experience. The believer in God casts all his burdens upon other shoulders; for him there is no worry, no weakness, no fear, no paralysis, no inefficiency. For if God be love, why should we fear; if God cares, why should we worry; if God guides and rules

all things, why should we be cast down? Christ's idea of God verifies itself continually in the mind that accepts it, and dwells upon it. It gives victory, and any one of us knows well enough in life the difference between defeat and victory. "This is the victory that overcometh—our faith."

The second way in which the Christian conception of God becomes effective for life is by testing or venture, and, as I have already spoken of it so much, I shall not dwell long upon it at this point, but something yet remains to be added to what I have said in this regard. Suggestion without active reinforcement will not carry one far; a man cannot accept ideas and at the same time refuse them, or refuse their obvious implications. Venture is necessary even for the sake of successful suggestion, and in itself it is needed as the necessary expression of a living faith. Without works suggestion is feeble, without works faith is dead. Our conception of God must be tested and ventured upon, not merely in prayer, spiritual meditation, and mental life, but in action, in concrete life. And venture proves that it is effective and true. For example, we must have a venturing trust in God's providence, *i.e.* in the power, wisdom, knowledge, and care of God. Many are the stories from Christian biography which might here be quoted, but you can find and read them for yourselves. One must even trust in God when

no way out of our impasse is obvious to our understanding. There is an economy in God's miracles, but they are a reality none the less; the power of God is never overtaxed; His resources are always enough, and always available; His all-sufficiency is proved in every brave and honest attempt to forget self in His work. God likes faith, and He rejoices to honour it. The apostolic days are still with us in isolated lives and circumstances; and modern religious literature has the proof of it in hundreds of recorded incidents. Such a life as that of Father John of the Russian Church, or that of Pastor Hsi of Manchuria, reminds us that the first blessing has never been revoked. It is we who are at fault, not God. We must learn anew from Christ that nothing is too hard for God, and nothing too small for God. Our imagination gets terrorised by scientific figures as we realise the immensity of the universe and our own physical insignificance. We need to stand once more with Christ upon the mountain of faith, and trust the God whom He trusted, the God who is great enough to care about the small things, great enough to be our Father, and to bear all our burdens with us, and for us, if we will let Him.

For the future we must venture more, whether along the line of voluntary poverty in our economic problems, as the mediæval saints, and as William James recently, have

suggested, or along some other line called for by the world's needs. Whether we be poor or no, we must be poor in spirit; for to be of the poor in spirit (*i.e.* dependent on God) is to be rich in faith, and so in power and in joy. It is not for men of wisdom and tact that God is looking, but for men of courage and faith, who will give the divine wisdom free course and become channels of the divine power and love. All rational courage must spring out of faith, and Christ's call is for such faith and such courage. Life is a great opportunity for brave men, and life's imperishable rewards are for faith. The reward of unfaith is death; in every sphere of life despair and fear make for the destruction of life and all life's goods. Faith is not only the great opportunity of human life, it is the necessity of an abiding life. Around us is a sea uncharted and mysterious, but, like all seas, it can be swum in by men who will venture, who will cease asking if Christianity works, and will begin to try it.

THE UNIVERSAL POWER OF OUR FAITH

But let us ask further—Granting our conception of God does work for us in this part of the world, is it effective the world over? Of course it needs a certain amount of translation to become intelligible in other environments, whether of time or place,

and such translation of God is the main work and meaning of theology in every age and clime; but once reasonably comprehensible to the people concerned, it does work, it does prove itself effective in life, and just as effective elsewhere as here. The essential message of God in Christ has been preached the world over, and with substantially the same results amongst all races and classes and tongues. The proof is clearly to hand in the story of Christian missions, in which the efficacy of our faith has been tested again and again, and its universal meaning and appeal demonstrated, in lives charged with new power and enthusiasm for all that is good, and in evil habits, customs, and influences transformed.

Sometimes it has been contended, by those learned men who regard Christianity as merely a civilising power, expressing the ideals of a high civilisation, and far beyond the comprehension or imitation of more primitive peoples, that missions to the more savage and unenlightened races are an absurd mistake, and a waste of personnel, time and money. The facts are otherwise. Savage peoples like the cannibals of the Solomon Islands, or the warriors of Uganda, have in a generation been changed utterly; and in individual cases have risen in character to a height that has shamed our boasted Western Christianity. No man is too low for our gospel of God in Christ. Deliver-

ance and elevation are possible for all the tribes of earth by the means of the Christian evangel. The islands of the sea, Japan, India, China, Africa, Greenland, South America, all give as powerful and convincing a testimony to the power of our gospel of the eternal God as do the older Christian civilisations of Europe and North America. Our gospel does work, but it cannot till it is known ; and how can they hear without a preacher ? If our salvation could be confined in rites and ceremonies, preaching might be dispensed with ; but it centres in the conception of God revealed by Christ, and therefore it must be spoken and interpreted by man to man. In the mission field, or at home, wherever the providence of God may call or place us, we must test and prove our faith, or it is dead ; we must live dangerously. The faith that will venture, and take the risks of venture, is the only faith that will call out the power of the Christian salvation, the power that will truly heal the broken-hearted, preach convincingly deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, the power that can in very deed set at liberty them that are bruised, or that can unashamedly and effectively preach the gospel, as Jesus did, to the poor. Like the three heroes of Israel who faced the fiery furnace for their faith, we must nail our colours to the mast—or the Cross if you prefer it—and declare and carry through our

venture of faith in words and deeds like theirs :—

> "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hands, O King ; *but if not*, be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." [1]

The words are a trumpet-call to faith, a rallying-point for all true believers ; faith like that is no weathercock that turns with the wind, and such faith still proves itself by its works, and demonstrates even to sceptical minds that the age of miracles is not gone.

THE SOCIAL TESTING OF CHRISTIANITY

Let us for a moment look at our question from the social standpoint. We have our social problems, many and serious. Does our conception of God meet them, and solve them effectively ? I believe it is the only solution, when, as in Christ's case, it is embodied in human flesh and the works of human brain and hand. Our very conception of God is essentially social ; it is that of Love ever going forth and seeking expression in others —the Father in the Son—ever giving itself for the life of its children. The self-emptying of God, found in theology in Paul's doctrine of the humiliation of Christ, is the great

[1] Daniel iii. 16-18.

fundamental reality of our lives within and of our universe without. Selflessness is the rock upon which the worlds are built, for it is the nature of God; and of all human conceptions it is that which has most social meaning. God's love is absolute, His humility perfect.

The Old Testament idea of God as the potentate who holds rebellious men in derision, the arbitrary and self-centred despot who seeks His own glory, is not the conception of God which Christ gave us, but something like its antithesis. The true glory of God is the welfare of His people, His creation; and God Himself is, of all beings, the most humble, the most unselfish, the most patient. Christ's great legislation for the Kingdom in the so-called "Sermon on the Mount" bases all its revolutionary, social, and ethical teaching upon one thing, the nature of God:—

> "Do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven; for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." [1]

Our conception of God, therefore, is our inspiration and example, our power, and even our programme; and, following God so, we shall become perfect, even as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect. The character of God is the background of the Christian gospel; and it works when tested, because men have

[1] Matt. v. 44, 45.

been made by God in His image. In other words, the Christian doctrine as preached by Christ is—Treat man as you would treat God, and as God Himself treats you—with reverence, with love, and with expectancy of the best; and, being divine in his ultimate texture, he will respond. And in actual fact he does, though sometimes we meet with temporary and even lengthy failures. But faith in man, the corollary of faith in God, is the way of progress; and modern methods in the education of children, the amelioration of criminals, and the like, have already given us reasonable evidence that Jesus Christ was right in His extraordinary teaching, which the Church has buried in a napkin for so long, except for individuals of vision and Godlikeness. Alexander Irvine has an appealing sketch of the power and meaning of such a Christianity in his first book, where "My Lady of the Chimney Corner" bids her friend look for, and see, the Son of Man even in the most despised of human lives. J. K. Jerome's *Passing of the Third-floor Back* is perhaps a still better known literary clothing of the same great message, that man is to be saved by recognising, not so much his sin and his shame, but his divinity, and his possibilities for all that is true and worthy. God is in man; and to realise it is to understand Christ's message of the Kingdom, and to have the key to all our problems, so far as we can have the

key. It is God who will solve them, not we; and that when we have put ourselves into His hands, like children, to be no longer our own, but His. In that selfless life we learn that egoism is our only real problem, and that the brotherhood of man is only another aspect of the fatherhood of God. Our problems are made by the insistence upon our rights, combined with the impossibility of defining or adjusting mutual rights, and along the line of rights there is no solution; the solution is ours only by the surrender of the idea of rights, in the interests of the Kingdom of God, and by the acceptance of that which we receive, rather than the grasping of that which we can lay hold of. Mercy not justice, atonement not retribution, love not law, grace not rights, are the meanings both of God and of faith. The *imitatio Dei*, which is in concrete fact the *imitatio Christi*, is the truest service both of God and of man. We use the words "immanence" and "transcendence" of God in relation to His dual presence, without us, and within. Transcendence means the fatherhood of God, immanence the brotherhood of man; and the two are one God, even as Christ and His Father are one.

INEFFECTIVE CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

But our conception of God does not always work; Christ's did, but ours does not always,

because it is often wrong. Wrong conceptions of God will not work, and thereby we can tell the true from the false. Some of our ideas of God are unworthy of man, some unworthy of Christian men. Let me speak of some such.

The man who, in danger or discomfort, cries upon God to deliver him, with no thought beyond his own pleasures and pains, and expects God, all forgotten in days of prosperity, to become an emergency exit to safety for his timorous body or mind, knows little of God, and can hardly expect to find his faith effective. The man who prays to God to avert some unpleasant possibility of the future, in the expectation that his prayer will avail to make God change His mind, knows little of God, and can hardly look for an answer such as he desires. Need does bring God very close to His children, and prayer does change things; but neither need nor prayer change God. His nature changeth not; but He may be enabled in our need, or by our prayer, to make effective to us gifts He has been offering all the time. God is not arbitrary in His doings. He is not partial in His tastes; He is not indulgent or lenient towards our sins. His love is perfect, strong, inexorable, and stern, and will take from us no pain, or sorrow, or discomfort, or struggle, which are necessary for our soul's truest welfare. He does not ever afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men; and

the true faith does not ask an easy way, but God's way, whatever it may be. And God is not to be bribed or argued out of His best love for us, merely because we think Him indulgent or partial or arbitrary; His selfless passion for us seeks our highest good, and will give us nothing less, no matter what the cost to us or to Him. Such unworthy views of God do not work; and the faith which can be lost in God, because He sends sorrow and conflict in place of ease and pleasure, is no faith at all, but a supreme egoism. The idea of the partiality of God is found often in such forms as the belief that God is a national or local deity, who has made us, or some other people, to be His peculiar possession, the elect of God, the salt of the earth; and that other peoples with other skins, other habitations and other tongues, are lower types of humanity. The "kultur mission," the "white man's burden," and the like, often conceal the belief in a national God which does not work. God cares as much for Egyptians, Indians and Germans as for Englishmen or Irishmen, for Roman Catholics as for Protestants; His universal interest and care know no geographical boundaries nor grades of favouritism. I do not say these things to irritate any one, but only under the twin convictions that they are true, and that they need to be said.

Again, in the common talk of God's justice we get another conception which often is

untrue and does not work. The theosophic law of Karma, and the orthodox Protestant doctrine of atonement, often represent the deification of an impersonal justice, which reacts like a machine against good and evil in different directions, rewarding the good and punishing the evil, as if it itself were a great neutral thing, and acted by blind instinct rather than benevolent purpose. This conception of justice, so common in popular theology, stands for something morally neuter and physically automatic, and has little in common with Christ's thought of God. Not justice, but righteousness, is the true word to use in this connection. God's interests are not to mete out its deserts to man's sin, but to change the sinner. His passion is for righteousness, not for punishment and reward. He is not a machine but a person, giving no pain which is unnecessary; not balancing our accounts of good and evil, but seeking only to bring good out of evil, and repentance out of transgression. It is righteous and purposeful love, not mechanical and neutral justice, which is the Christian conception of God. Men do not get their deserts either in this world or in the next, but they get the discipline which a selfless love appoints as necessary for their growth in spiritual understanding and achievement, and for the leading of the human soul to surrender itself to God. All conversion, all religious experience prove the truth of the

Christian view—it works. The other is a figment of man's imagination which does not, and never did, work. Love, not law, is at the helm in our passage over the ocean of life; and it is a personal, purposeful, inexorable and enduring love, to which a man can commit everything without either fear or shame.

Again, God is not the author of evil in character or circumstances. It is true in a very real sense that "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world"; but that does not mean that things are satisfactory, or that they do not require changing. As the Westminster Confession of Faith has pointed out, to say that God ordains evil does not make Him the author of it. The Christian view of God only warrants us in saying that out of evil God is bringing, and will bring, good; it does not call evil good.

> "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by *wicked* hands have crucified and slain, whom God hath raised."[1]

God's purpose and man's sin go hand in hand, though their habitations are poles asunder.

God is no excuse for human sin, for insanitary housing, for sweating wages, for ignorance, and dirt, and hate. Out of these terrible things He will indeed bring forth good as men respond to His call. At present he can only overrule them, perhaps for revolution, perhaps for

[1] Acts ii. 23, 24.

spiritual awakening, but ultimately for good. It is men who are holding Him back with their present unworthy hearts and unworthy actions. Christianity gives us no divine right for present conditions; nay! it makes us hate many of them, as nothing else does or can—and why? Because God hates them, and would change them as soon as men will co-operate with Him in that work.

The defenders of slavery claimed the fiat of God for it, but their conception of God did not work, even though they quoted Scripture to their purpose. In its cruder manifestations Christianity has by now condemned it, but not yet in its subtler forms. Indeed the amount of work still to be done is appalling when we realise it. Let us get at it at once, and remember that Christianity would wean us from satisfaction with the present to a satisfaction with God alone, and with the future which He can make for man when life is made over to Him as its only ideal and master. God in Christ, selfless living in the present for the future, is Christianity. To live dangerously, socially, sincerely, and trustfully, that is the Christian salvation; and it works. Wrong conceptions will not and cannot work, because they are rooted in nothing but our ignorance; the true conception, the mind of Christ about God, so far as we can understand and appropriate it, will and does work, because it is rooted in the foundations of life and all that

is. But the world sorely needs brave men who will try and prove that way, the way of God in Christ, and so lift the whole round earth nearer to God, and to all that even now we value in life. If we have done this, when our day for leaving our work on earth behind us shall come, shall we not rejoice in the presence of the King ? If we have not done this, no matter what fame or wealth or other self-importance we may have achieved, shall we not know and sorrow that we have sold our lives, our opportunities, our birthright, for a mess of pottage ?

The Fourth Question: Is it Final?

WHITTIER the poet once asked Emerson the essayist if he believed that Jesus Christ was the final revelation of God to man. "His is the greatest life the world has so far known," was the reply, "but not the greatest it shall know." There we have the question of the finality of our Christian faith definitely raised by two great and good men who actually disagreed as to the answer. It may be that a discussion of the question by me to-day will not lead any of us very much nearer to giving a personal answer than we are; but I think it might be of help to touch upon the points which are of chief importance to us, and, if possible, to clear up our minds on some essential matters. It is our faith in God which is in question, for the life of Jesus Christ means nothing but failure and high-sounding words apart from a belief in the unseen; it is in relation to the unseen world that He becomes all important. For the Christian consciousness and experience, Jesus Christ, the highest life we know, is the measure of God, the effective and concrete symbol of the invisible realities.

THE PROBLEM STATED

But the highest we know is not necessarily the highest possible. Have we any right to

assume that it is ? Or if not, in what sense can we speak of Christ's interpretation of God, in teaching and life, as final ? It is a serious question, though not really so serious as it looks, for it belongs to the sphere of speculation rather than to that of the practical reason by which we live ; but it is serious enough, if, like the majority within the Churches to-day, we misunderstand the issues, and assume that Christianity stands or falls by a belief that Jesus Christ is not only unsurpassed, but altogether, and in every respect, and in every sphere of life's activities, unsurpassable. There is often an extraordinary confusion of thought and values here, and a failure to discriminate between the spiritual and vital aspects of religion and the physical or psychological limitations imposed on its expression in any age or environment. In some former days Christ was conceived of as exactly six feet high, on the assumption that that was a perfect height, and that Christ must in everything have been perfect ; a theory with a confusion of values which has done more harm in the doctrines both of Christ's person and of the Scriptures, the Words living and written, than any other such, and which rests upon the altogether ridiculous assumption that Christ is a final and perfect model of man in everything,—art, letters, science, criticism, carpentering, theology, archæology, music, and the like,—as well as

in the spheres of morality and religion. It would have been even more reasonable to assume that Christ's height was infinite than to decide upon six feet, but in that case the doctrinaires would have seen the absurdity much more easily.

The question, however, is a serious one, because there is behind it both a true perception of Christ's meaning, and a confusion of thought as to the theological bearing of that meaning; and to clear up this matter, so far as I personally can see the issues, may, I think, be of help to some. To me individually the finality of Christ in some sense or senses appears as perfectly reasonable; but it is important to face and understand the realities of the situation before we attempt an answer. Any attempt to bully our own or other minds into giving the answer "yes," in the belief that we must do so, or "without doubt we shall perish everlastingly," is sheer absurdity, and only recoils disastrously upon the soul that does it. The only "yes" worth anything is a sincere and intelligent one. Truth must be faced without prejudice, and with a sincere attempt to accept all light from every quarter, and to follow truth wherever it may lead. Truth is God, and sincerity cannot lead a man nearer to hell, or away from God; for God is not divided against Himself, and sincerity is one of the high roads to His presence that the soul must travel, or be lost in the wilder-

ness. I know of no way of accepting truly the Christian faith which does not rest upon a willingness to change it any day for a better, if the other faith in question could be proved really more satisfactory, and more entitled to our acceptance.

It is only when a man stands firm upon truth and sincerity that he begins to realise the power of Christianity, to realise that he is not holding it, but it is holding him. Truth is not so much a thing for which we have to fight, as a thing which fights for us if we will let it. Therefore, I would say—Fear not to discuss whether Jesus Christ be final. It is by the actual comparison of our Scriptures with other books, not by their artificial segregation, that we begin to appreciate their true worth; it is by the comparison of Jesus Christ with other great men, not by His theological segregation from other men, that we begin, like the first apostles, to see His true meaning and glory, full of grace and truth; and it will be by the actual facing of the question of Christ's finality as a real thing that we shall come to understand in what sense we can predicate finality of Him, and in what sense to do so is a denial of faith. And again I repeat, Christ's finality is, and must be, the finality of that faith in God by which He lived, and to which He has led our minds as His disciples.

IN WHAT SENSES CHRIST CANNOT BE FINAL

Let us take the question, then, seriously. Is Christ final for us? Is His life the final revelation of God? Is His teaching the final word on all man's problems, or on some, or on none? Let us grant on the basis of the former addresses that Christ's is the highest life known to us, so far as we can differentiate between lives with their multiplicity of values and interests, of powers and aspirations; the future is still unknown, and can we assert, on the basis of the past, that nothing higher can come in the future than has already come? I am now going deliberately to put things very bluntly, because of the necessity of our seeing clearly the issues involved. Is it not presumption, is it not dogmatism, to assert that Christ is final? Is it not at bottom an unscrupulous attempt at all costs to gain certainty and assurance in matters of faith, which leads us so vehemently to assure one another that the Christ upon whom we have leant cannot become less final for us, no matter how long the earth may abide, but is God's last word to men on this side of the grave?

What do we mean by the word "final" as applied to the Christian faith? We mean last, or ultimate, no doubt, but in what sense? As covering all life, or a part of life, or what? On all sides we see in the world about us progress of varying kinds. We see intellectual

progress in the understanding of life, and in synthesising our knowledge and building upon it ever more successful practical methods or adaptations of nature ; progress in the understanding of our own minds, of nature's content, of nature's laws, of actual facts in every sphere. We see æsthetic progress in the appreciation of ever new forms of beauty, in the adaptation of nature's powers to beautify and enrich life in every direction, in the refining and strengthening of our æsthetic faculties and of our nervous organisations, in the production of classics of beauty, and so forth. We see moral progress, so called, in the continuous uplifting of mankind from the brutal to the humane stage of life, in the disappearance of social, economic, industrial, and international abuses, and, even where failure is yet to be recorded, in the steady growth of public opinion against these things ; progress in the institutional developments by which morality is preserved, and handed on as a heritage won for future generations, and so forth. There are some difficulties in the theory of progress, I admit, but not very serious ; accepting progress, then, can we regard events of nearly two millenniums ago, such as the mind and actions of Jesus Christ, as final in an absolute and all-inclusive sense ? Has not mankind advanced in a hundred ways since then, and are not many of these advances quite free from any direct connection with

the life and work of Christ? The problem becomes acute in a matter like Biblical criticism or biological science. Are Christ's theories of the authorship of Deuteronomy, or of the 110th Psalm, final for us, or His views about astronomy, or even about angels and demons? Does God really brand as blasphemy all sincere attempts to understand the world, which have led men to repudiate the account of creation in the book of Genesis in favour of the account given by Darwin and others, or to repudiate the traditions of the Old Testament writings held by the Jews of Christ's day, and by Him often in common with them, in favour of later views based on the hard brain labour of scholars? Or is it only a mistaken theology that denounces these seeming advances of thought as blasphemous, a theology which prefers supposed certainties of the past to the venturing faith of the present by which alone any of us are saved?

Quite seriously, I think we must admit progress along nearly every line since Christ was here; but not a little of that progress is the indirect result of the new spirit He brought; for "deny thyself" is not only Christ's first principle of life, it is the first principle of all the noblest science and art, and the secret of their achievements. It is to this spirit of Christ that we shall have to look, rather than to its external vestments, as that which is most original and most final in Christ's work;

and certainly we do not honour it, but dishonour it, by shutting our eyes and ears to present facts, and living in an old-world paradise of our own or our forefathers' imagining, in which are to be found the exact answers to all our questions and problems. Such a view puts the fool's cap on all history since Christ. God did not forestall the twentieth century in the first; to each century He has given its own work; and the true meaning of Christ does not rob life of any of its achievements, or of its conscious quests after truth, beauty and goodness: the history of man's thought was not foreclosed in Jesus Christ, or in the Scriptures of Jews and Christians. Whatever finality there may be about the revelation given us in Christ, it is not a finality of personality or of truth *in toto*; on the æsthetic and intellectual sides of His life, at least, no finality is to be found, and few to-day would even waste their time in looking for it, and in trying to prove that Christ was the greatest artist and the greatest scientist that the world has known; and even on the moral side finality must be sought in the spirit, not always or necessarily in the historical forms, of Christ's teaching or life.

IN WHAT SENSE FINALITY IS POSSIBLE

No reasonable doctrine of divine incarnation can carry us much further than this. If the docetic heresy of an unreal humanity

be really a heresy—and few of us will quarrel with that judgment of the Church—and if the invisible God reveals Himself in human personality, we have at least come to realise to-day that, to reveal Himself, God must limit Himself in time and place. He can, moreover, only deal with men as they are, and as they are able to bear and understand. The life, the personality, the teaching of Christ are conditioned historically and locally by age and environment, by education, geography, heredity, and a thousand other things, in such a way that no finality can be traced in the forms of His revelation, many of which are to-day actually in the dust-bin of the past. It is not the Galilean Jew who is final, but something which tabernacled in Him, and expressed itself in the forms of its time, both in thought and practice. God's revelation to man is a revelation not of the letter which killeth, but of the spirit which giveth life; and in so far as we can speak of Christ as final, and His revelation or thought of God as final, we shall find such finality to lie in His moral and spiritual meaning for us, in His attitude of soul to God and man, in that spirit of His life which has breathed through the ages that followed, but which in the days of His flesh clothed itself inevitably in intellectual, æsthetic, and institutional clothes largely made by others, the forms of His time; that spirit which is none other than

the eternal God manifest in the flesh. Many are the interpretations made of Christ—social reformer, apocalyptist, mystic, and the like—but one thing is clear from the variety and verisimilitude of these interpretations, that they all rest upon one foundation—the mind of Christ—for they all breathe the same spirit; all are true in measure, but also all are inadequate as interpreting the full meaning of Christ, for this is to be found, not in what He did or said, but in what He was, above all in His attitude towards God and its outworking in His treatment of man. There, amid all the historical, literary, and ethical problems which surround His life and person, we find God; and at bottom the finality of Christ for us is a simple matter, it is a matter of His absolute self-surrender to God, His selflessness, in which all the problems of life are somehow lost to view as secondary things. The selfless or mystic life of dependence and sonship revealed in Christ is such a simple solution of all our problems that we struggle against it; we are so convinced of the complexity of our own lives, and so anxious to find some dogmatic or other external prop in our thought of Christ, that the idea of salvation by unity with Him in His spirit of selflessness is readily rejected, both as too easy *and* as too hard—philosophically too easy, but morally too hard. We want a more complicated but less exacting system, and the simplicity that is in Christ

lies like a pearl in the mud unnoticed amid all our great philosophical, social, political, and ethical discussions. Yet I venture to affirm that all religion rests upon one thing, our attitude towards God, the not-self, the All, the universe, the fundamental life or reality of things; and that in that sphere of will, or morality, or spirit, Jesus Christ, and none other, is the Captain of our salvation.

But let us look a little more closely at these points before we come to a positive conclusion in answering our question of to-day. In the forms of thought, in the knowledge of nature, in the achievements of art and the developing appreciation of ever more elaborate and perfect forms of beauty and its expression, and in a hundred other ways such as social science, economic comprehension, political theory, we can mark the world's progress far beyond the historical limits of the life of Christ. We know to-day many things which were not known to Christ; His knowledge was such as the Father granted to Him for the specific work of His mission, and everywhere Christ definitely recognises these limitations of His life, and His dependence for knowledge as for all else upon the Father. Intellectually, then, the Christ of the Gospels is not final, but, in so far as intellectual gain is morally conditioned, He is none the less the true leader even of the intellectuals themselves. His free criticism of the Old Testament, His bold rejection of

Jewish customs and prejudices, His brilliant dialectic and repartees in debate and difficult situations, His whole-hearted acceptance of truth from any quarter and perception of goodness in any one, even the most despised—in the outcast harlot, the hated Roman, the despised Syrophœnician, the heretic Samaritan—all point to a spirit of self-denial in the pursuit of God's truth which is the primary condition of gaining it, and which makes Him the leader of all sincere thought, the greatest exponent of the will to believe. But, as He had a certain height, so He had a certain brain, a certain education, being those ordained by the Father as suitable for His work, but none the less historically and socially conditioned and limited. What matters for us is what lay behind these things, not the instrument which His powers or organs of mind and body constituted, but the player upon it and the spirit in which He played it. The forms of life are advancing with us, but can we seriously hold that the life itself, which uses these forms, is advancing or has advanced beyond Jesus Christ ? Have we improved in any real sense upon that which made of a village carpenter the greatest name of the ages ? I think not. This does not answer my question—" Is the revelation in Jesus final ? " but at least it shows us along what lines finality is to be looked for, if at all.

THE TRUE FINALITY OF CHRIST

The spirit of Jesus Christ towards God, and man, and all things, the spirit of love, or selflessness, or trust, or dependence (for all mean the same at bottom, viz. the refusal of egoism), is the greatest quickening power of the ages, and is none other than the spirit of God clothed with human flesh and mind. As regards a future development beyond that ideal life, it is not easy to see how we could advance beyond it. We may perhaps, in some things, be driven to modify or to ignore certain views of Christ, *e.g.* in His theological or scientific statements, where they seem to conflict with His spirit, or with investigated facts; but that is only to deny the letter that we may the more exalt the spirit. Moreover we have the warrants of both Christ and Paul for setting the spirit above the letter, and for judging the letter by the spirit:—

> "Our sufficiency is of God, who also has made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit, for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." [1]

If in points we must question the words of the historic Jesus, it is only to exalt the living and eternal Son of God, whose spirit even yet leads us on into all truth, and still takes of the things of Jesus and interprets them to us.

[1] 2 Cor. iii. 5, 6.

Fifty years ago it was popular to interpret Christ as a social reformer, and with partial truth; to-day it is popular to interpret Him an as apocalyptic enthusiast, and again with partial truth; but a further and truer interpretation is already to hand in a number of modern writings, of which perhaps the most challenging and interesting is Hauptmann's version of the life of Christ translated into terms of our own days, in a book with a strange title, *The Fool in Christ*, an interpretation of Christ as the great mystic. To my mind this is the truest interpretation yet made of Christ, according to which Christ's life was one of absolute dependence upon the unseen Father; a dependence for knowledge, power, guidance, and the like, in which self was lost in the two conceptions, which are at bottom one, of God and His Kingdom, *i.e.* self was denied in the service of the one true God, unseen even to faith, but found in man and all visible things. Beyond this life of perfect consecration, absolute self-surrender, continual dependence, trust and love, towards God the Father and all that is of God, *i.e.* to the All, as to-day we might say, is it conceivable that we could advance? Not along that line, I think; therefore, to my mind, it is reasonable to speak of Christ as morally or spiritually final in His thought of God, and in the essential life built upon that thought.

Of course inconceivable does not mean impossible. In other words, the question cannot be closed logically; but an admission that a higher than Christ's revelation is to us inconceivable seems to be about as much as we could reasonably ask from any thinker. Only dogmatism can take the last step and declare that God could not give a higher revelation; and to that dogmatism I do not feel called to aspire, nor do I think that for practical purposes it can have any but an injurious outcome. To say that Jesus Christ is the highest we know, and that a higher is to us inconceivable, is surely as much as we need for life; and in what senses we can say this I have been trying to indicate. Practical faith is not dogmatic speculation, and practical faith is satisfied with positives; only the vain striving after a comfortable assurance has created the dogmatic negatives of theology, which have rarely been anything but a curse to the Church. Positives are nearly always right; negatives are often wrong; so let us beware.

Let us, then, affirm what God is, and what Christ is, and get on with the work of the world. God asks nothing more than positive obedience; He does not ask from us anathemas, as the Church too often has; He asks us to follow Christ, and in our own hearts we hear the call. Speculation is a luxury usually, and often a waste of time. When a certain

man of the Gospel record tried it regarding the final number of the elect—"Are there few that be saved?"—Christ's only answer was the seemingly inconsequent warning against being misled by talkers—"See that no man deceive you"; and I think God's voice says the same to us to-day. Speculation has its rights, even in theology; but an emphasis upon speculation has usually led men astray out of the high roads of spiritual endeavour and concrete life into the curious questionings of gnosticism and theosophy, or the celestial mathematics of apocalyptic literature such as Daniel or Revelation. Spiritual energies get absorbed, as at Thessalonica and Colosse, in these bypaths of religion, and the most futile of books are eagerly read and digested, with no real gain in those things which matter in the eyes of God, such as love, and humility, and mutual service—the gifts which St Paul puts first in the Christian scale.

FORM AND SPIRIT

But, whatever we may say of the finality of the Christian faith in God given to us in Jesus Christ, one thing is certain—our form of that faith is not final. The intellectual progress of mankind and the intellectual progress of the Christian religion are alike marked by the scrapping of forms. Every age in measure fashions its own, and rejects past forms, that it

may put the new wine of its own day into new bottles, lest both be lost. That is, our form is essentially provincial in place and time, and this is only another way of saying that it is not final nor universal. The test of universality is a serious matter. Our form is not final chiefly because it is largely a European one. The East had a little to do with the beginnings of our faith, but only a little; we know it in a theological dress put together with infinite care and labour in the Western world. It has its special affinities with the East and other parts of the world, but these are yet largely to be discovered; and we shall not have a universal faith intellectually till we have a universal faith geographically. Other races than ours, with their own special visions of God, and their own peculiar treasures of mind and spirit, must interpret our faith, both for their own sakes, and for ours, that it may become universal.

But Christianity has in it the promise and potency of a universal dominion, tested and proved already in every quarter of the earth; and such universality surely promises something very like finality! A universal religion must be largely a final religion, and this finality Christianity seems to possess already very manifestly, though only potentially yet as regards some parts of the earth's surface. We need our Christian missionaries, and a universal Church, before we shall be able to proclaim

truly a universal Christ and a universal faith in God.

Again, we must, in dealing with this whole question, distinguish very clearly and firmly between form and life, between letter and spirit. In Christ we have a perfect spirit, a perfect life, a final faith in the imperfect vestments, social, historical, and intellectual, of a provincial Judaism and an apocalyptic peasant piety; that is, we must penetrate beneath the clothes to the abiding reality for our final faith. This finality lies, and will lie, so far as our mind can conceive the problem and the future at all, in the moral finality of His spirit. This, interpreted or restated by the various lands of the earth in their own terms, will give us a universal and a final gospel, for which we must in this day labour hard, in view of the desperate international situation as regards war and economic exploitation; things which are the antithesis of the spirit of Christ, and which can be met only by that spirit when it has been understood, appreciated and assimilated.

This moral finality of the spirit of Jesus Christ for the future is supported by the past history of Christianity. The faith of Christ, embodied socially in the Church, intellectually in Christian theology, and morally in the institutions of Christendom, has shown an extraordinary power of adaptation and assimilation similar to that of all true life. Every

age of Christianity has lived its own life, and the forms of that life have varied enormously. Again and again the Church has changed its form or appearance, but in varying forms the one gospel, the one life and the one spirit have remained, to break out anew in days of degradation and stagnation. The Church has reached depths of infamy and moral humiliation almost unknown to secular organisations, it has been paganised at times out of all recognition, but it has survived by virtue of something in it, some holy thing fundamental to it, the spirit and life of Jesus Christ dwelling in a remnant, often obscure in the eyes of men, but the link of life with the great days when the Son of Man walked our earth. In the Church, then, we have the evidence of a real and perpetual life in spite of all men's attempts to submerge it in things evil and deadly; and this life is a presage of its own immortality, of its own finality in spirit, if not in form.

Another point, already alluded to, which supports the idea of finality in some form for the Christian faith is its power of universal appeal, proved so often on the mission field. Our early forefathers in these islands felt its appeal as surely as the South Seas or China of to-day. The gospel needs a certain amount of translation in every country, not only into the local language, but into local forms of thought; yet in spite of this local variation in its statement, the same gospel substantially as first

blessed the world in Christ's teaching has substantially the same appeal to a human nature, which, for all our progress or other changes, is substantially the same as in apostolic days; and our Gospel, or good news, is the conception of God which Christ revealed, and in the power of which He lived. Out of different racial and national types, separated in forms of thought and practice, there is emerging everywhere one Church, united in the fundamentals of the Christian faith, however diverse at the circumference of its life. Does not the universality of the appeal of our Gospel strengthen our conception of its finality? In Christ's thought of God, and in the spirit of Christ Himself, all races of men are finding the solutions of their individual and social needs; and never was this fact more evident than it is to-day. The satisfying moral revelation for mankind as we know it has been, and is being, found in Christ; does not this argue finality as in some sense a reasonable belief, even if not logically demonstrable?

But let us remember that, going outside the spiritual and ethical sphere, we must not look to Christ as a revelation intended to supersede, and make of none effect, our own thinking and feeling, and our own struggles after better forms of life; intellectually and æsthetically Christ is not our final revelation, though His spirit is our greatest help towards the attainment of an ever greater truth and

beauty. And if in these spheres of mental activity Christ is not a final revelation, still less are our Scriptures so. The mission of Christ was not to forestall modern science, or literature, or art, but to show men the way to God, and to make effective that knowledge of the unseen in human experience. Within that realm we must acknowledge Him as the one luminous spot in the universe as we know it, as the central figure of all history, as our personal Saviour and Master in life. The forms of our life we must with toil fashion for ourselves, in theology, criticism, science, art, mechanics, and all other practical attempts to understand and apply our human understanding to the world about us; but the spirit of our life is from Him, a flame lit at His light, as we find it in the pages of our New Testament, and as we see it later in the experience of the true apostolic succession of Christ-like lives which adorn the ages intervening between the days of His flesh and ours.

THE CHURCH AND PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

Forms in life come and go, churches and religious movements wax and wane; and to speak of the finality of Christianity does not imply a belief that the Church, as at present constituted and known to us, will survive. Indeed it will not survive the judgments of man or of history unless it be worthy and fit

to do so, facing the challenges of each age, and conquering in the humility and power of the spirit of Christ. Nor does it imply a belief that the Christian conception of God as interpreted by us will ultimately survive. In history the interpretations of God, even within the Church, have been many, Jewish, Greek, Latin, Teutonic, feudal, forensic, deist, pantheist, despotic, sentimental, and so forth—none of them attaining to the fulness or depth of Christ's original interpretation, all local, ephemeral and partial things. Forms cannot give life; only life can beget life; therefore it is to the spirit, not to the letter, that we must look for our finality. Forms to-day are crumbling in every sphere, partly through their own senile decay, partly through the inbursting of new life. We must champion, not the forms, but the spirit, so far as we can differentiate the one from the other.

The Church is in the testing; "every day is judgment day." Christianity, we say, has failed; and we know that it is not Christ but Antichrist who has failed us, because we gave our lip service to Christ, and put our trust in Antichrist. The religious issues of the day are obvious and serious. Our gospel has failed only because it is not Christ's; our individual religion has failed because it is not Christ's; our social schemes have failed because they are not Christ's. We need to remake things more in harmony with the spirit of our

Master; intellectual restatement cannot be avoided; social reconstruction and mission work on more Christian lines must be done. We need missionaries to the heathen abroad, and to the heathen at home; men and women with a minimum of sentimental love for the past, and a maximum of practical interest in the present; men and women with a justly low estimate of ecclesiastical methods, and a justly high enthusiasm for the methods of Christ. We even need missionaries to the Pharisees and Sadducees of the day; men who will not only not scorn the souls of the poor, but who will not scorn even the souls of the rich and educated, as is the fashion of popular evangelism to-day, and an involuntary confession of its own weakness; men who will dare to think, and to think hard, for the world's sake, and who will win to the Church its twentieth century representatives of Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Barnabas, and Paul; men who recognise the divine value of education, and the difficulties of the student, and who realise what a university student like a Saul of Tarsus can do for Christianity.

Success at home has always gone with success abroad; intensively and extensively the Kingdom grows simultaneously. Let us seek our own place, wherever in God's earth it may be, and let us be satisfied with nothing else. The gospel must be universal in every sense if it is to be final in any sense. We

need to-day a greater zeal and enthusiasm to work for Christ; we need a greater courage to realise in the hard cash of the Kingdom of God even such Christianity as we have got; we need a greater humility to learn and accept truth from any quarter, whether Romanism, or Theosophy, or science, or any other living attempt to understand life; and we need a greater devotion to dare things for God and man, to prove our faith to ourselves, and to commend it to others as reasonable, as necessary, and as true.

I am not sure that this discussion has been very illuminating or helpful in its methods or results, but I have aimed at pointing out certain things of importance, ideas which are sometimes held by men, and which are not true, and ideas which are both fundamentally true, and practically effective and valuable, in our conception of Christ's finality for faith. I have endeavoured to show that there are absurd ideas of finality which no reasonable man, and no sincere follower of Christ, can hold, ideas which negate progress and our highest values in the interests of mental sloth, selfish comfort and assurance; and I have tried to show in what senses we can speak of Christ's gospel or thought of God as final, viz.:—in the first place, as possessing the finality of a universal religion, capable of appealing to, transforming, and uplifting all races and types of men, except perhaps the

very few in Christian lands whose sophistication for the present has been secured by the folly and dogmatism of half-educated and half-hearted Christians, men whose warping lies largely at the door of official Christianity, and whose very rebellion has in it the seeds of a greater Christianity, when negatives shall, in a new atmosphere, have been changed into positives. And in addition to this present actual, and greater future, universality of our faith, we find in Christianity, in the second place, a spirit of an absolute kind, the spirit of Christ toward God and man and all things, which is in itself a perfect moral revelation. The spirit or attitude revealed in Jesus Christ, of a God-centred, self-denying life, is something which we can confidently speak of as final; and in it we perceive the solution of all our problems, intellectual, æsthetic, social, international, and the like; for as surely as the will lies behind, and conditions, our external life of action and our inward life of thought, so surely does the will-transforming spirit of Christ condition all true progress. Modern science is a child of the sincerity and selfless love of truth which, in modern times, has been made effective by the example and spirit of Jesus Christ. If we will but drink of that spirit, and live within the circle of its influence and power, we shall have no fears or worries, hatreds, suspicions, or greeds, to sap the mind,

and undermine the fabric of our social and international life, but victory, peace, and harmony without and within. True health comes from within ; and the life of communion with God, meditation upon Him, and imitation of Him, is the life of individual and social health and well-being, physical, moral, political, economic, and international.

THE GOSPEL AND THE WORLD'S NEED

Our gospel is Jesus Christ, because our gospel is a thought of God to which Jesus Christ gave expression in life, in teaching, and in the abiding spirit and influence of His personality. For us Christ is the revelation, the measure, the interpreter of God, the Word made flesh ; and this gospel, of what God is and does, is for us made effective and concrete in the life of Jesus Christ by His trust, His dependence, His selfless interest in the Kingdom of God, His active love and humility, His freedom and courage in face of all circumstances, and in relation to all sorts and conditions of men. There, in His life and His teaching, we find our Christian conception of God both proclaimed and incarnated ; it was the greatest of gifts, it is the precious inheritance of the Church visible or invisible. But what has it done for us ? It has done much ; but how little in comparison with what it might have done, had the Church been more faithful

and more venturesome in its following of Christ! Look at the position to-day! We see around us the great international problems that spring from greed, suspicion, and pride, in the physical and moral wreckage of war, and the national money-grubbing which exploits weaker peoples for the advantage of the stronger; we see the moral and social problems of our more domestic life, immorality, intemperance, gambling, the futile waste of life and wealth in the pursuit of the dust and ashes of earth's selfish pleasures; we see the industrial and economic strife of class with class, the clash of selfish interests, the bitterness of mutual suspicion, misunderstanding, and even hate, the refusal to subordinate private interests to the general good, and the belief in the divine right of present conditions, or the divine right of bloody revolution; we see the absurd intolerance of political differences, and the refusal to face facts, or to admit in practice the brotherhood of man which we preach and profess;—all these things contrary to the spirit of Christ, but many of them done in His name, and with the blessing of Christian churches, where the blind still so often lead the blind. Unfortunately, yet fortunately, Christ cannot be identified with His Church, or with any branch of it that I know. Science still challenges our faith in part, and often sincerely enough, because it does not understand. Art is in rebellion

against a Christianity both misunderstood and misunderstanding. The earth is full of trouble and of problems.

Look at our own city, depressed in trade, torn by ignorant factions who do not understand one another, nor wish to; slipping down like other great cities into all manner of moral filth and impotence; with a waning church-going population, and a tremendous growth of gambling, and of all kinds of useless or harmful ways of spending the time that is so short, and the money that is so scarce; with few seemingly caring much for things beyond bread and butter, hoary antipathies, and sensual pleasures! Does it not need Christ to heal its wounds? The spirit of Christ would lead us to ignore our political differences, our inherited dislikes, and to care for one another as children of one God and Father; it would lift us to a worthier life, to a truer prosperity which no trade depression could destroy, to a better enthusiasm and purpose in life and in the use of life's coinage, material or human. The Protestant must learn to love and think for, to appreciate and work alongside, his Roman Catholic neighbour, or he is crucifying afresh the Son of Man—and *vice versa* of course, but at the moment I am speaking only to Protestants. Political differences on either side are insufficient to excuse a lack of the love which Christ brought, and which knows no limits of place, or interest,

or political creed. And so with our other problems. We must, in a word, follow Christ —not worship Him by keeping the thought of Him for certain days or places, not abstractly debate or champion His theoretical finality— but follow Him, and apply practically the faith we have learned from Him. I know well we shall not feather our nests in this generation by following Christ; but we shall do work worthy of our manhood and of our Christian calling, and we shall find the pearl of great price in the truest sense. We have the one life to live here, the one death to die; can we be satisfied to take the popular line of least resistance, and to pass out of the world amid the applause of timid and ignorant men to meet the rebuke of God? Must we not try to please Him alone, and not men, whatever be the price, and however our work may be criticised, or scoffed at, or imperilled? God seen in Christ is, I believe, the one solution of all these our troubles; but it needs brave hearts and honest minds to apply it to life. Communion with God as known in Christ, venture upon God as preached by Christ, imitation of God as practised by Christ—these are the true Christian life. Such a life will not be easy, but it will be satisfying, and it will be worthy of those whom God has called into His Kingdom by Christ Jesus. The true finality for us of our faith in God is, that it is the solvent of all the difficulties before us, the

answer to all the needs around us; let us get on with the work of its application to life, and leave the speculation and the difficulties, theoretical and practical, with God. We have the clue to the labyrinth in our hands; it is enough. "Keep Thou my feet. I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me." Let us live a moment at a time in the spirit of Christ, and in the power of the Father whom He trusted.

CONCLUSION

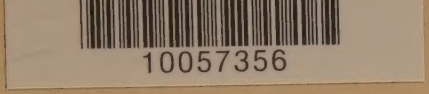
In these addresses I have sought to show, in the first place, that it is reasonable to believe in God as Christ preached Him and believed on Him; reasonable to believe that He is one, rather than to accept the so-called atheism or agnosticism, but the actual polytheism, of modern unbelief, with its acceptance of a multitude of unsystematised principles, values, powers, and the like; reasonable to believe in His being, His personality, His goodness, His Fatherhood, His perfection and all-sufficiency, otherwise we discover our own actual or potential superiority to God, and invert our whole universe: and I have tried to point out in this connection the true relation between Christ and our faith in God, as making of Christ the mediator between God and man, the measure or interpreter of the unseen. I have sought, in the second place, to show

that the conception of God given us by Christ satisfies, and is necessary to satisfy, our thought, our aspirations, our spiritual, moral and physical needs, necessary for health of body, mind and soul, and necessary to the best life as fulfilling the true ideals of the gentleman or the sportsman: and in this connection I have tried to make clear the issues between the true Christianity and that subtle paganism of our time which so often masks itself behind vague popular phrases and powerful popular passions or sentiments. I have sought, in the third place, to show that this faith in God through Jesus Christ is effective in practical life, that it works when actually tested, whether by Christ Himself, or the apostolic community, or by the martyrs and saints of the ages, or by ordinary men and women like ourselves; but I have tried to emphasise the view that a true faith will not merely ask, but venture, and that only in venture will real satisfaction and assurance be found: and in this connection I have tried to point out that wrong ideas of God will not, and cannot, work, and how greatly we need to discriminate between the true and the false in our thought of God, testing all things by the mind that was in Christ. And, finally, I have sought to show that this conception of God, given in and through Christ, is enough, and more than enough, for us to proceed with as the solution of all our problems, being not only the best

we know, but the best we can conceive. Its finality lies in its potential universality, and in the spirit of Jesus Christ through which it found, and finds, expression. Not the forms but the spirit abides, and continual restatement and missionary work are both essential to its true finality and its ultimate victory, and to its actual power in any age or environment. We must live our faith; there is no alternative for a living Church.

And so we come back to our faith in God, and to the need of venture upon it in all spheres of human life. The great need of man individually and socially is God, not the name but the reality, the personal, loving, all-sufficient life behind all things, and seeking expression in them, above all in men and women. And to make this reality of God effective for man we must consciously accept it, venture upon it, and minister our gospel to the world as a living and tested fact. There I leave our study of these great things.

> And now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.
>
> AMEN.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Our faith in God through Jesus Christ